This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600077893/

ONLY EVE.

By Mrs. J. CALBRAITH LUNN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Vol. II.

London:
SAMPSON LOW, MARSTON, LOW, & SEARLE,
CROWN BUILDINGS, 188, FLEET STREET.
1873.

[*All rights reserved.*]

249. g. 171.

CONTENTS.

CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Eve's First Paradise	1
II.	Disenchantment	24
III.	Gone	47
IV.	A Word in Time	61
V.	San Serle at Home	74
VI.	Loosening Links	97
VII.	A Lover's Good-bye	114
VIII.	Reflected Lights	130
IX.	The lonely Farm-house	148
X.	A failing Sense	164
XI.	Some Lessons for Eve	182
XII.	Between the Spinnies	200
XIII.	Will Fletcher in Trouble	222
XIV.	Conferences	237
XV.	An old Friend at Wyckam	245
XVI.	Society avenges Itself	269

ONLY EVE.

CHAPTER I.

EVE'S FIRST PARADISE.

EVE, trusting, ardent Eve, was utterly unconscious of meriting all this anxious consideration. Perhaps she would have been as happy and heedless if she had known all about it; for she possessed two very gracious gifts, beauty and talent, and they were her very own. She was youthful enough to believe in their omnipotence, and old enough, she verily believed, to exercise them for the world's delight and her personal emancipation. And Mr. Serle was making the way clear for her. On their way home he had managed, in spite of Mrs. Cameron's presence,

to make known his admiration of her and her talent. Indeed he had told that lady, in his free and careless, but meaning way, that her young *protégée* only required some high professional advantages to shine in music's celestial hemisphere, one of its bright, particular stars.

"My son teaches Eve, sir," Mrs. Cameron had responded, in her driest and most conclusive tone.

"Ah, yes; but nothing is effected out of London, you are aware."

She chose to accept his drawling pronunciation literally. "There is plenty of affectation in London, I don't doubt. Now we are at home, and I thank you for your escort. Good-night." She could not find the keyhole so instantly as she would have done, and Serle took the opportunity of speaking to Eve. His voice was low and careless, as usual, but significant.

"If you ever need an introduction, or wish to come to London, write to my sister. Mr. Fielding will give you her address. We do help people to get along sometimes," he said.

This was enough to throw open the gates of paradise to the charmed girl. Her mother's

profound scheme, if it were her mother's wisdom that had put her in Mr. Cameron's way, was on the point of a perfect success; her own ineffable desires might all be realized. She thought but little of the old master that night; the past was so dreary and limited to look upon, the future so triumphant and alluring. To her young mind there was nothing strange in this interference on Serle's part; it seemed quite natural that he should be kind to any one who could sing. Mr. Cameron had been even more kind and disinterested; had taken her and taught her when she had but the slightest pretention to beauty, and when her talent could show but the faintest signs. And were not musicians bound, by the glorious privileges they shared, to be good to each other? Whether bound or not, they ought to be; for who else could know the complete soul-subduing ecstasy of the hour of their triumph, or the no less subduing relaxation after the hour had passed? It appeared, indeed, that this reaction of a spirit overtaxed had set in; for Eve, in the very midst of her great gladness, and in the first blush of her new life, sat down by her

little bed and wept like a poor desolate child—wept till she was indignant at her own weakness, and brushed away the tears with a ruthless, impatient hand. Everything had to be thought over and settled yet; perhaps she ought to see her mother, but she did not know. If it were possible she would go immediately, before Mr. Cameron came back to throw difficulties in the way. There would be difficulties, she was sure, if she saw him again, and of a kind she had hitherto never experienced and did not even understand. The dreary, unhomelike dwelling of the poor girl's childhood and her mother's flimsy character, surrounded by the gaudiness, without the grace, of a prossiofenal career, had done so little towards developing any genuine feeling in her soul—and now that it might be developed she was afraid of it.

Like most people before a crisis in their lives, Eve thought going to bed a very irksome waste of time, so she put her things in order that she might be ready at a moment's notice. All the old, worn fragments of clothes were rolled up into an ineligible bundle and stowed disrespectfully

into a corner. "I have heard of great singers keeping their poor frocks as memorials—thank you, I have had quite enough of them," she said, to herself, as she pushed out of sight with her foot the discarded garments. "If I keep a memorial at all, it shall be something that has a meaning to it beyond myself, or it would mean nothing of any worth to me."

As Eve gave expression to this crude bit of metaphysics she took out an old pocket-book in which was folded, instead of leaves, a musical score, her master's composition, pricked down for her lesson one day when he wished to lead out her power of expression in some particular way. She had never lost the singular, intense idea of that lesson. Never before had she known what constituted the difference between the inspiration her own soul could supply and that which came from other sources. Ever since she had regarded that hour as the one of her soul's birth; whence the quickening had come she could not have told. That little bit of manuscript was her greatest treasure; intrinsically, it was a tiny portion of her master's life, and

it had been given in all its beauty and pathos for her only. This was a memento never to be lost. There was another thing not so easily disposed of—the dress which had caused her an infinite variety of sensations, from the flush of pride in the possession of the first "grown-up," beautiful robe, to the yet warmer flush of shame when the consciousness dawned that she had got it shamefully, by another's sin, and not simply, as she and Will had once fancied and laughingly asserted, as a good "lark." Precious as this dress had been in her eyes, she had her doubts now as to whether it should not go in the disreputable bundle with the blue wincey. There was strife in her mind; for she remembered how well she had looked in it, and her conscience was not a very strong interpreter yet. The result was, it might as well go into her box, as it would do nobody any good to make an example of it at this late hour of her Framborough life. Presently, when there was no longer any thing to be done, Eve lay down and slept rather late into the morning. Wondering why she had not been called, she went down-stairs, feeling dis-

enchanted and very real. The kitchen was just as she had left it; so, thinking the mistress must be ill, she set quietly about her work and prepared the breakfast, and then went to Mrs. Cameron's room with a cup of tea. The old lady had passed a restless night, and said she thought she was not very well and would remain where she was for a while.

When Eve came down again she found Mr. and Miss Serle and Bernard Fielding in the house. Bernard had brought two workmen to mend the warehouse windows; and they all went to the ransacked room, to put it as much in order as they could before the return of the master.

Bernard had received a letter from him that morning announcing the results of his foreign mission, and asking him, rather cynically, to make the facts as public as he liked.

Seeing Eve glance every now and then in a wistful, disconsolate way at Mr. Serle—the whispered promises of the preceding night being more precious to her mind than to his—Bernard told her she might go to Mrs. Cameron with the tidings of this expected early return of her master. San Serle had

not spoken to Eve, but he had not overlooked her or repented of his proposal. He followed her almost immediately and met her as she was coming down-stairs. He too had been thinking about this scheme of getting Eve to London; but, as he was accustomed to have his desires met without much trouble, a few minutes' reflection had sufficed; and after sleeping upon the idea it seemed still more desirable and urgent. He took Eve's hand and led her into the large empty parlour, and then seated himself with the air of one of the privileged. Eve stood before him, looking pretty, but not at all like Esther before her king.

"So you would like to go to London and take lessons from one of our great masters?" he asked, with his calm, regal smile.

"Yes, very much indeed! But I have no money," Eve replied, her heart beating very strongly, though Mr. Serle was gentle and always made a comfortable atmosphere for others as well as himself.

"Never mind about the money! I have plenty, I believe; besides, my sister is very clever. We teach singing ourselves some-

times, when we meet with people who are kind enough to learn without much trouble."

Eve looked at the great man with a still profounder respect and gratitude; she was indeed too much impressed to know what to say.

"In the meantime, can you not sit down?"

"Oh, no, thank you, sir."

Serle smiled at her reverent simplicity, smiled with a certain feeling of satisfaction; because he had perceived some fine nature and much genius in this child, and also, that her reverence was by no means indiscriminate.

"Why not?" he asked, with some humour in his look; "you sat before us last night, I believe; and I hope you will sit sometimes if you come to reside with us, or I shall feel uncomfortable."

Eve's eyes fell involuntarily on her frock; she felt the extreme incompatibility of assuming any thing like community with this grand personage in the investiture of her every-day life.

"Ay, I see; but we read, I think, somewhere, that clothes do not make the man, and I infer they do not always make the woman.

We dress sometimes to meet popular prejudice. It makes life more harmonious, that is all. Now have you any friends in London with whom you could live if you were to go with us?"

Eve hesitated before replying, "I do not know any one in London; but perhaps mamma does."

Serle seemed unpleasantly surprised. "I thought Mr. Fielding said you were an orphan!" he exclaimed. "Are you really possessed of a mother, and have you sordid and besetting friends?"

Eve felt tempted to deny the imputation, Mr. Serle looked so confounded; and perhaps he might refuse to have any thing more to do with her. Still, to deny her mother's very existence in plain, round words would be rather a stronger form of falsehood than she was quite equal to at the present moment.

"I don't think mamma would interfere with me if I were learning, sir," she said. "I was intended to be a singer, but she fell ill and became too poor to take care of me. Mr. Cameron does not know she is alive, nor Mr. Fielding, and I ought not to have told you."

"Oh, indeed!" exclaimed Serle, stroking his long, silky moustache and feeling amused, notwithstanding his decided objection to this newly-discovered complication—Eve looked so very interesting and imploring as she cast herself and her secret at his mercy.

"But your mamma might come and claim you just when you were getting on brilliantly, and it would be extremely inconvenient. Mothers do such very uncomfortable things sometimes. Is she a person of character?" He felt particularly discomposed as soon as he had asked this question. Such an idea seemed wanting in decorum before the child. It was thoughtless and inconsequent, and yet, perhaps, it behoved him to know. "I beg your pardon—never mind," he added.

Eve could not help minding. This was precisely the matter she was sensitive about; perhaps because she had a morbid desire to know who and what her father had been, and had never heard his name mentioned or his being hinted at. She coloured and answered, with some little dignity, "Mamma was a public singer. She had a very fine voice, and was beautiful till she caught the small-pox. People said she might have been a *prima*

donna if she had been better taught and had had any good friends."

"Ah! what was she called?" Serle asked, with interest. "I should think I know every singer of any note."

Eve gave the professional name without hesitation, firmly believing that it had been honourably borne. "She is married again, I believe; and now I don't know any more about her."

"Ah, well, I am glad of that—she will not be likely to want you. There are plenty more, I daresay—and her husband must take care of her, of course." This was said in a contemplative way, and Serle sat thinking and looking at Eve for a minute or two. Then he rose, saying, "My sister and I are returning to town to-morrow by the morning coach. If you will be at the turn for Wyckam when we pass, you may get in. I see no other way."

Eve's heart bounded with extreme delight. This sudden day-spring would realize her fairest and most ardent dreams. Life in London, and under the patronage of such distinguished people as the Serles were, must

be a life of intense enjoyment in itself, and a means to a grand and perfect future. She had not a doubt of her own powers, and not a misgiving as to the generous intents of San Serle. She, at sixteen, looked upon him, at six and thirty, as a middle-aged or rather elderly person, eccentric perhaps, but one of that brotherhood who have a right to be eccentric and who possess the divine right of mutual and kindly service. She tried to make a proper curtsy and to thank him in a seemly way. Serle, who used to say it was impossible for her ever to do any thing awkwardly, was charmed with the quivering lip and tearful eye, and when she managed to say, "Thank you, sir, you are very good to me," he patted her head gently, in a beneficent way, and murmured some words about being good enough when it suited him.

He went out of the parlour, leaving her standing there half-dazed with gladness, but returned to say, "I think you had better not mention this matter to any one. I will say all that is necessary."

Eve started then, as if suddenly awakening to some facts. "Oh, Mr. Serle, there is Mr.

Cameron! Will it not be very wrong and ungrateful to go while he is away?" she exclaimed.

"Eh! 'tis a little fool after all," said he. "Do you not think poor Cameron will be thankful to find the charge and trouble transferred?"

"Perhaps so," she said, with a sigh.

"You know he could not do much more for you, and he might feel perplexed about you as you are growing up. Women cannot be suppressed for long."

"Then I will go," she said, with decision.

"You will be on the road between Framborough and the Wyckam toll-bar when the coach passes in the morning, and we will pick you up. I feel sure you will not regret the change; at least it can be tried."

Eve made her curtsy now; it was the only response she could give; her heart seeming quite overladen with opposing feelings.

When Serle returned to the wareroom he found his sister coquetting gracefully with Bernard, who was ruefully contemplating the outraged violono.

"I can do nothing with it," he said, mournfully. "The wretches have wrenched away its

arc. It is a body without a soul. Only a creator can restore it."

Miss Serle put a lachrymatory to his eyes, as she replied, "I would be sorry if I could, for your sake, Bernard, but I have such an antipathy to bears. I was hugged by one in a crowd by mistake when I was a child, through my maid's curiosity. Your Mr. Cameron brings the scene to my mind; he presumes on his cleverness; he is too rugged."

"Cameron is a gentleman to the backbone," exclaimed the indignant Bernard. "How can you repeat such rude remarks?"

"Dinny, you are too fantastic. Leave Bernard for half an hour to these remains, and come and walk with me. It is our last day at Framborough."

Her brother's voice was Dinorah's law, however congenially she might be occupied, but she replied, with a slight appeal,—

"I know it is our last day, therefore why do you wish to walk with me? Can we not walk together any day?"

"Ay, but we do not walk in London, you know, and the exercise is so novel and so delightful here. Come!"

The brother and sister strolled through the Wyckam fields with the quiet enjoyment people always contrive to feel when they are ruralizing, however they may prefer ease and society and elegant appliances in town.

"I wonder how long this would last, San, this pleasure in hearing and seeing and doing nothing from morning till night, from night till morning?" Dinorah exclaimed, a colour almost perceptible on her cheeks.

"Suppose we try. There is enough, I believe, somewhere for our comfort. Shall we settle in quiet, sleepy old Framborough and dream to the drone of the stocking-frames till the end wakes us up?" San asked, as he swung himself to and fro by one of the little gates that marked off the path to the hall. "Why, child, you look disenchanted and awake already!"

"I always am before the idea of the fixed and unalterable. My hold on life is charming, inasmuch as it is light and uncertain. I like you, San, and our London life, because you are mine only by a chance the slightest whim may intercept, and because we are always open to change."

"Then you will be pleased with a new arrangement I have been making to-day—a little addition to our household."

"You don't mean to tell me you are going to be married, San?" cried Miss Serle, a real flush mounting to her fair brow.

"I wish you would not put such an idea into my head, Dinny. You are really a sore disturber of my peace. No; my news is simply that the Graceful Consort is going home with us, to remain in the family and learn singing if we like her; and if not, to go about her business, of course—you know my charity has not attained to enduring all things yet."

Miss Serle's surprise was tinged with disapprobation. "It is a great risk," she said, without, however, much thought of opposition. "It is a risk to us all; and not least so to the girl."

"I don't see that. The poor young thing has been caged long enough, why should it not have its freedom and sing in its native element? You yourself were quite stirred with admiration and feeling last night; I saw that in your eyes."

"But it does not follow that my eyes are a safe and infallible guide. I feel them going all wrong sometimes. Now, in the first place, how are we to come to this dear, dreamy old place again when you have carried off the *protégée* of that arch-monster Cameron? Does Bernard Fielding know?"

"Nobody knows, and nobody cares, and nobody is to know, Dinny, if you please. You see, I am not a young fellow, wild or conceited, or anything of that sort, or I might be fancying there was some earthly leaven in the child's enthusiastic desire to put herself in our hands. In that case I should most strenuously forbear, and leave her to her forlorn fate; but I am convinced it is purely musical and artistic fire that is smouldering and waiting to be fanned into a vital flame. She must come, and we will have her well taught; she will be an object of interest in our lives, which were becoming somewhat monotonous," Serle urged, with unwonted vigour.

"In the second place," pursued Dinorah, as if she had not heard him, "you fall in love so facilely; not very dangerously, or

loudly, I admit, but still sufficiently to make yourself foolish and me anxious, to say nothing about the object of your love. Every time I breathe under protest, thinking what might be if you did not know when to draw back."

"Oh, I have conquered love so long ago! I shall be *le père* this time; we shall restore our past in the fervours and hopes and successes of this young enthusiast. Look how old and vapid I am beginning to look! I detest crow's feet about one's eyes; they would all get smoothed away before this new and smiling influence."

"In the third place," Dinorah persevered, "this taking-up and letting-go of young maidens, simply as recreation or balm of Gilead for your own vapid existence, as you term our extremely happy and exciting life, is not according with my ideas of a generous, self-denying nature, as I believe yours was originally intended to be."

"Ay, originally; but it got a cross which rather perverted it. You know now I have to make the best bargain with myself that is possible; and I really feel good and praiseworthy, rather than not, in this matter."

"And then," continued Miss Serle, looking as if she had at last brought her leading points up satisfactorily, "you see how great a responsibility falls upon me. I love my ease and freedom, and shall weary of having a young, pervading being always about me. When she talks I shall forget to listen, and when she is silent I shall be wondering what she is thinking about; and, upon the whole, it will be an innovation, something like getting married or dying. To tell you the truth, my dear, this Eve has too much soul already, she will not take life serenely; and we shall be answerable for all her episodes henceforth."

"Dear Dinny, this is not only selfish, it is cowardly, and, I must tell you, all you have said is decidedly of a canty kind, and unworthy of you. This sense of responsibility ought to make us heroic, and not dastardly. This simple-minded child, this beautiful Eve, this clever, fervid, gracile soul, will be something for us to cultivate—we will try, Dinny, will we not? She will be ours, you know, our spirits' daughter. Without her, I am afraid we shall neither of us have any little blossom from the good Father's garden."

San Serle seemed to have emerged from his languor and to be about to show what kind of spirit he was of. Dinorah, too, with all her indolence and affected frivolity, was always ready to be quickened by a thought, if it were only plain and acute enough to invade the habit of her life.

"You are right, San, I verily believe!" she said, looking transfigured also. "You and I have not yet thought properly about some things. If ever we should set our faces steadily towards the Holy City, we shall perhaps be glad of a child's hand, our steps will be rather faltering and feeble. But it is such a very sudden fancy—only came into your head to-day, did you say? She too must be very easily moved."

"Oh, no, the fancy, as you call it, is quite an antique. It was bred on the night of Mr. Cameron's concert, and I am convinced we were mutually moved then to the same great end. I saw a young creature striving with heart and soul to interpret a master's grand idea, and she did interpret well, too, young as she was, and she saw in me the prince who could, if he would, break the spell that bound

her to a dull and sordid life, and give her grace and freedom to do and be. I have been very much harassed all this time, I assure you, quite worn with the exercise, feeling that if she were left here she would fall a prey to the moths and moulds, or fall in love with Bernard, who would never dream of returning the honour; and so she would be driven to despair, and eventually marry George Cameron."

"Dear old San, why did you not confide in me earlier?"

"Because I thought it would be good for me to work at the problem alone, and indeed I am half afraid of Cameron. He must have taken infinite pains with her, and she thinks rather too seriously about him. I think we must keep him in ignorance of her place of abode, and Eve evidently thinks so too."

"I quite agree to that—any thing to keep us from this modern Cato, who absolutely frightens me with his stern principle and antagonisms to all living things. I am sure he is as ugly and uncomfortable as the immortalized censor who is still on guard at Rome. Is there not a strong physical resemblance?"

"Ay. Listen calmly, Dinny. This Eve has a mother, and I require your feminine instinct concerning her. Will she pursue and compel us to give up her child?"

"Certainly, if she finds out where she is. What a horror!"

"Then come with me to Eve this minute. I am afraid she will not be circumspect; natural ties are so strong and subtle."

CHAPTER II.

DISENCHANTMENT.

MR. SERLE was right in his conjecture, but too late to avert the consequence he feared, Eve having started in search of her mother when he and Dinorah called again at Mrs. Cameron's. The child had a kind of awe of this mother, excited probably by those visits to the theatre at which she sang, when the little sensitive maid had quivered with pride, and something akin to fear, as she beheld her own mamma in the midst of the factitious splendours and thrilling sentiment of her profession; and this awe had been fostered by a peculiar air of mystery and reserve in the actress, which Eve had never been able to break through, and which had had its effect in binding her spirit rather than her heart. She went through a little system

of reasoning with herself which amounted to something like a spring of conscience. Her mother ought to know, for they both had the same end in view; and if the mother did not agree with the daughter's present idea as to the means, why the difference must exist. Of course she must go with the Serles; and when she had informed her only parent, she had surely done her duty. So she dressed carefully, putting on the white muslin gown at last, for she was her own mistress now, and the sun was shining almost as if the summer was at hand.

Eve was aware that her mother did not live very far from Wyckam, and expected she could find her easily by applying to Mrs. Bray, Mr. Forrest's housekeeper, who was an intimate and old acquaintance. Still she would rather not go to Mrs. Bray if she could manage otherwise; it was possible the Fletchers could tell her, so to Box Court she hastened.

No one was to be seen except Kitty; the lawless attack of the previous day having made concealment on the part of the two Fletchers their most politic course.

Kitty was in great tribulation. She had taken no part in the rioting, it was not in her way, and her strength would have been quite inadequate, neither would her sense of right have permitted her to have laid her hand on the property of others. Yet she had heard of rich feasting at other people's expense, which in her extreme poverty and weakness appeared not altogether an unrighteous matter; and she thought it rather hard that not a morsel had come by any means to her mouth. Father and brother, like some greater leaders, had been too general and public in their zeal to be individually benefited by their exertions; and as their demeanour convinced her that they were marked men, and in some peril, anxiety for them was added to her general suffering.

"Why, Kitty, you look like a ghost of yourself! If it were dark I should run away with what folks call quite a turn!" cried Eve, feeling more troubled at the poor girl's appearance than she chose to show.

Kitty smiled feebly. "I almost wish I was a ghost; I should not feel so badly, I should think—but there's no knowing; perhaps I may

be glad of my body yet, with all its aches and wants. I think one is apt to get bad fancies, left alone and without any thing to eat."

"You don't mean that, Kitty? They are surely not leaving you without food!"

"I have not broken my fast to-day."

Eve looked her pity and consternation; and then sat still thinking.

"Are you too weak to do a little work, supposing you had enough to eat and drink?" she asked.

"Indeed I don't know. I've been getting low for a long while, and my mind is harried with lots of things. You know I used to think that I was sure to be saved, and it made me selfish and glad, and I didn't mind what came of me here, and didn't think much about other people. Now there's Will has been going wrong and wronger, and father is not as he should be; and when I think that, maybe, their names are not in the Book, I feel fit to go distracted."

"What book do you want them to be in?" Eve asked dimly. "Is it some charity?"

"O Eve! surely you know! There has been a Book from the very beginning, where

every one's name is put down who is to be saved. It is said, that people must know for certain by their own feelings whether their names are there or not; and when they feel so sure, it makes them so happy they can't care a bit about common things that make up so much of our lives here, and the sin and misery that are, don't seem to matter, but they are just ready to sit and sing praises as if they were in Heaven already. I could once, but not now."

"I should hope not!" exclaimed Eve, in an indignant tone. "I should despise them that could. But never you mind these things, Kitty. I don't see that they are your business; we have to get along first, anyhow. I'm sure it was never meant that we should come to a full stop, or be made wretched, or what would be the good of all the wish and fuss there is to get on? Now just take care of yourself, and tell Will he must work, and play no longer, wasting his time. I mayn't see him again, for I am going away."

"Are you going to be married, as you are all in white?" asked Kitty, a little of her languor passing off.

"Oh, no! I am only going to London to perfect myself in singing with Mr.——" Eve checked her communication. "I was not to say any thing about it, so never mind—only I will try to get you into my place if you will get strong. It is not a bad place at all for any one who is not born to something else, you know. I suppose you don't know where mamma is now? I wish to see her."

Kitty did not know, but thought the housekeeper at Wyckam could tell, as her aunt Sophy had said she was kind to her. "But I am sorry you are going away, it will be worse and worse never to see any one a bit pleasant and friendly," said Kitty, who, notwithstanding her enthusiasm for abstract and unearthly things, had a strong partiality for the bright and hopeful Eve.

"I don't mean to be sorry; it is of no use when you have to make your way in the world; that is, you know, if you mean it to be a right, good, prosperous way, as mine is to be."

"Ay, like a star, I suppose, all shining or nowhere," Kitty exclaimed, with the sudden

inspiration that comes with illness sometimes, "and quite out of my way?"

"No, Kitty, not quite; at least if you get my place at Mrs. Cameron's; and I will try for that. Now good-bye, dear old Kitty!"

Eve kissed the poor little sorrowful face; and perhaps a shade of sorrowful feeling crossed her heart as she did so, for she turned quickly away, and made no reply to Kitty's desponding farewell.

"I don't think I shall ever see you again, Eve; not on this side the river Jordan at any rate. You've always seemed of a different sort from us; and you get prettier and prettier, more like the shining ones, I fancy. Perhaps after all it is the right thing to be trustful and happy; and I always said the lies were mostly for fun, because you could think of nothing better."

"I left the old lady in bed, Kitty, and I must not lose any more time. Just take care of yourself till you hear something from me," said Eve kindly, as she left the cottage.

Mr. Serle's suggestion that possibly her mother might make some inconvenient search after her when her flight was discovered,

induced Eve to make an attempt to see her or to send her some message; so much as she disliked going to Wyckam Hall, she thought, upon the whole, there would be more peace of mind in her new home if this little duty were fulfilled.

Eve had never been through those Wyckam fields since she could remember; and did not know how pleasant a walk by the green banks, delicately green now with the young spring leaves under the old-fashioned bowery hedges, could be. She could scarcely keep herself from lingering to enjoy her hour of freedom, especially when she reached the brook with its willow fringe. Never in her life had she known a child's simple pleasures, never been in a field rich with buttercups and cowslips, or seen how kindly and bountifully lovely things are sown over the earth for any one who cares for them. Mrs. Cameron had no idea that people could need a walk for the mere sake of walking, and for years had found exercise enough for herself and her maidens, in the necessary household work, and Eve's musical studies had completely filled her leisure. She snatched a handful of

the sweet apple-scented blossoms of the pink willow herb and pressed them lovingly to her face, thinking that perhaps the time might come when she could sit down in the flowery meadows and pull the pretty, sweet cowslips, or look tranquilly upward to the deep and tender sky, without feeling this impelling necessity that had ever lain upon her, to get on. "Surely I shall be far enough, sometime, not to mind," she said mentally, as the last swing-gate closed after her and she stood before the old house.

Eve was in the habit of assuring herself that she was not shy or timid, and that no mortal man could make her feel uncomfortably self-conscious, little, and awkward, or "nowhere," as she interpreted, except Mr. Forrest; and nothing would have taken her to his abode had she not been sure he was still out of England. When, therefore, she saw a gentleman coming straight from the house and towards her, the impulse to run away was childishly strong, till she recognized the great man who had chosen to sequester himself there. Seeing this slender, white-robed maiden apparently at a loss to

know which way to turn, he raised his hat courteously and directed her to the front door. She was naturally rather elated by this distinction, and Mrs. Bray's greeting was very discordant.

"Why, Eve Fletcher, what on earth brings you here, dressed like a play-actor, and to the front door, too?"

Never having seen this person before, and never having heard herself called a Fletcher, she was put upon a dignified footing at once. So she said, stiffly, "I understand you know where mamma is living; and as I am going to leave Mrs. Cameron I wish to have her address, that she may be seen or written to."

There were two or three doors in the housekeeper's room leading, perhaps, to closets. Eve had noticed that one door closed upon some unseen person as she entered; and there was a hand upon the fastening now, as if it were about to be opened. Mrs. Bray rose and locked it, and then said, with an objectionable strength of manner,—

"I should recommend you to stay where

you are, Eve Fletcher. The likes of you have no business to be going about on your own head; and you certainly can't get your ma's address. She knows best what is for your good; she and them that has the management of her, however."

"If you don't choose to give me mamma's address you may spare yourself any further trouble about me; only I am going away to-morrow and do not wish her to put herself about—I shall be well off. That's all."

As Eve spoke with an unwonted air of stately self-possession, not wishing to show any temper before this rude woman, though her face would flush with anger, the handle of the closet door was again moved.

"Well, then, I suppose you can go," said Mrs. Bray; and she showed Eve out in a peremptory way.

"Perhaps you had better tell me where you are going to?" she added, as soon as they had left the room.

"No, thank you, I think I can manage my own affairs better than that," Eve exclaimed, finding the temptation to being saucy irresistible. "And you may tell the person

that's shut up in the closet, listeners don't always get off so easily." Then she let herself out at the front door and walked straight down the drive, never looking back, and so unconscious that another woman had joined the housekeeper, and was watching her attentively from the window.

"You ought to have let me out, Ann Bray," said the recent prisoner of the closet. "I ought to know what the poor child has got in her head. She is too young to know what's for her own good yet."

"Well, she may be, but she don't look it. I never saw any one so shot up, or stuck up, I might say, if I was not speaking to her mamma. However, I never heard that Sophy Fletcher was the sort of person to put a young girl on the right tack." Mrs. Bray gave a sniff that was probably expressive of her meaning, though, as her face had a questionable simper upon it, she might be exercising her wit.

Her companion was either not sharp enough or free enough to heed the meaning. "At any rate, I might have found out where she is going to," she remarked meekly.

"I don't see that knowing would do you much good. There are some things one has to know, but a great many that we are better without knowing. Now I warrant it will be better when the master comes home, and asks after Eve, that you should know nothing whatever about her goings on."

"I never thought of that!" said Sophy.

"No; you never did think of anything. So now let us settle which of these ribbons goes best with my dress; you have good taste, leastways used to have."

Eve had only two ideas as she went home, so the road seemed very short. Her indignation against Mrs. Bray was strong, and she wondered who was shut up in that closet.

Mrs. Cameron had come down-stairs and was having some tea, so Eve expected a reprimand for absenting herself without leave. The old lady only remarked, in a quiet way, "You should not leave the house, child, when its old mistress is not able to look after things." She looked too weak to be angry, and Eve's heart relented as she thought of her project of leaving the old mistress for ever. She slipped up-stairs to get her gown

changed before it was seen; and the perplexities and inconveniences of existence made themselves strangely evident and exacting. It really appeared as if circumstances would not accord in a happy, satisfactory manner. Just on the point of realizing the great desire of her soul—freedom from poverty and uncongenial toil for a life of sufficient leisure to enjoy things—instead of perfect, unqualified satisfaction, two or three most untoward elements were mingling and making her feel thoughtless, ungrateful, and even anxious. Who would have expected the stern, self-reliant, proud Mrs. Cameron to fall ill and really need the little ministrations of the poor, dependent Eve? who would tax this thoughtless gay child of the hour, this soul that reflected every aspect of each passing moment only to brighten or to caricature it, with feeling a real touch of what seemed like genuine love and regret? She wished Mrs. Cameron would say something sharp, rebuke her for thoughtless waste of time, or set her to work harshly, and not sit looking so feeble and so patient.

Eve set herself to the never-ending task

of stocking welting, and was thinking this the longest, dreariest evening she had ever known, when Bernard brought his mother intending to have an explanation of Will Fletcher's relations with Eve. He saw the two ladies deeply interested in a dissertation on Mrs. Cameron's unprecedented illness, and then returned to the kitchen and the young delinquent. Bernard had thought over his plan of attack; he must be very direct and decided, and as brief as possible, even a trifle stern, or the fanciful, flighty girl would lead him over a continent of follies and answer him never a word. His first sentence was pointed enough.

"You did not speak truly last night when you said you did not know Will Fletcher. I saw the lie in your eyes, and it has been confirmed to me since. Why did you deny the young fellow?" he asked, sitting down, in his usual quiet way, by her side.

Eve did not raise her head or stay her hand as she replied carelessly, "I am sure I don't know."

"Is that all you are going to tell me?"

"That is the truth, at any rate, unless I

think ever so much; and I am not in a reasoning humour."

"You admit, then, that you know each other?"

Eve smiled; "Framborough is not such a very large place that I should not be known after singing in the assembly room. Do you suppose there is a single girl in the town who does not know Mr. Bernard Fielding?"

"Now don't be saucy. I have particular reasons for wishing to know your motive for denying Will. It would have been quite as easy to say 'Yes' as 'No,' last night—easier, I should think, to a girl with a conscience."

"I expect I have no conscience, then; at any rate, I don't fall into the easy ways; I prefer the excitement and the chances of a grand difficulty," said Eve, giving the heap of stockings an ignominious shove.

"Of course that is all very well with a good, honest difficulty, but to tell a lie to get yourself into one, is more insane than to tell a lie to get out of one, as most people do."

"Oh, Mr. Fielding, why did you not stop in time? You wise, good people spoil every

thing by saying a little bit too much. Don't you know how hateful routine is?" Eve exclaimed, evidently in one of her perverse moods.

Bernard was afraid he was not likely to win her confidence; he would try if he could take it by storm, so he said, "You did Will Fletcher a serious injury last night by your untruth!"

"How?" Eve asked quickly; her large eyes, that had been looking so orientally languid, brightened with interest.

Bernard saw the change; and, though he could not feel any jealousy, he liked this evidence of regard as little as people usually do like a sign of inapt preference.

"How can any thing I say hurt Will Fletcher?" she repeated more gently.

"We all saw the falsehood—thank heaven, your brow is truthful—so I and, of course, Miss Elton began to wonder why you were ashamed, and how you could be acquainted. That unfortunate affair of Mr. Elton rushed into my mind; and, after you were gone, we talked about it and concluded that you were in each other's confidence; and perhaps

neither of you, being in ignorance, could be quite innocent. Is not this a natural conclusion?"

"Particularly kind and charitable in you and Miss Elton—and she had just kissed me!" Eve's tone was indignant enough to be innocent.

Bernard looked sorry; but he was beginning to learn that the most tender and abstaining course is not always the merciful one. "How can you be surprised if you are judged according to appearances?" he asked. "If you and Will are so particularly interested in each other, why mind being classed together? However, we are losing time; and I only came, wishing to find you free from all blame if possible; and if that were too hard, to warn you that Mr. Cameron does not think well of young Fletcher, and means to bring him up, either to clear himself or Mr. Elton, at the very first opportunity. Now I believe Mr. Cameron would be deeply grieved if he discovered that you were in any respect connected with this unprincipled lad; and Miss Elton and I are extremely anxious to find that our suspicions

are baseless. Can you not tell me what bond there is between you two?"

"I am really very much obliged to Miss Elton for her interest, but I would rather she did not kiss me." Eve's natural temper was so sweet that Bernard used to think she might say these perverse things and pout or frown without injury to herself or any one else. He was rather perplexed with her now, and asked why she was so unfriendly towards Mary Elton, who never even thought unkindly of any one.

"Of course it is of no consequence to Miss Elton what such a girl as I am can think or say, when there are two gentlemen, and perhaps three for any thing I know, in love with her!" Eve looked wonderfully knowing as she spoke.

"What do you mean, Eve?" Bernard asked, colouring in spite of his determination not to blush.

"I mean, that being engaged to one gentleman, she has no right to suffer another to care for her."

Bernard passed over one inviting point of controversy in this declaration to ask the critical question, "Who do you suppose would

be so absurdly bold or romantic as to care for an engaged girl?"

"Perhaps one who is absurdly modest and matter-of-fact, or who might put Mr. Forrest's chances out," said Eve, nodding her precocious young head wisely. "Some people are too honourable ever to get what they want."

The foolish ardent girl could not refer to him, Bernard reflected. Still he felt curious to know whom she was thinking about, and what she was building her romance upon. He was youthful and ardent enough to be easily won from the disagreeable duty he had imposed upon himself, by any thing resembling a love affair. "Do you mean Mr. Cameron?" he asked, giving, he thought, plenty of latitude for Eve's fancy to play about.

But again she nodded a decided affirmation.

"You are a young goose!" Bernard remarked, while he knitted his brows and thought. Several trifling symptoms took a new significance with this light thrown upon them. Still it was less shocking to accuse Eve of absurdity than to endow Mr. Cameron

with a hopeless passion. "You and I are inexperienced yet, happily, in these things," he added; "you must be mistaken."

"Are we?" exclaimed the maiden, so suddenly and so archly Bernard was startled and questioned her with his eyes. "I believe girls know all about love affairs by the time they know their own mothers. Of course I don't mean its disappointments and miseries; they have no idea of faithlessness, or love that can get no return, till they have felt something from experience. But what we do know is, that there is something that glorifies life, that keeps all base, bad things out of sight; and, as I said, girls feel that love has this power from the very beginning, and trust it. Yes," Eve went on, incited, as it seemed, by Bernard's surprised, curious look, "love is very like music in church; there may be plenty of deceitful, wicked people, but while the organ plays who thinks of them?"

"Really, Eve, are all girls like you, if they were to speak out as you do?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I never knew any one but Kitty Fletcher, and she is a little

Methodist," said Eve, forgetting what admission she was permitting.

"Oh, you do know the Fletchers, then, after all?"

"Yes, after all—and now what will you make out of that?" Eve was vexed with this slip of her tongue; but, as she said to herself, it was not likely that she could be always minding herself.

"I don't wish to make any harm of it, only I had rather you did not know them. They will do you no good."

"There is not a better little soul in Framborough than Kitty."

"But what of Will? Framborough thinks badly enough of Will Fletcher. What does Eve think of him?"

Eve tightened her lips and looked obstinately silent.

"Well, then, if you will not speak out, I must, for your sake. There is a price set on his head; and he must answer for some of his strange doings before long."

Bernard expected to see Eve look frightened, but she only shook her head and said, "Poor, stupid old Will, whatever do you expect to get out of him?"

"Now, Bernard, my boy, Miss Serle will be wondering why you are out so long on this her last evening!" Mrs Fielding exclaimed, as she entered the kitchen and put an end to his cross-examination of Eve.

CHAPTER III.

GONE.

ON that day week Mr. Cameron came home. Some rumours of the recent outrage had reached him, and the last stage had been one of extreme anxiety. The usual exaggerations, however, had not prepared him for the full desolation that had befallen; the broken windows and smashed stocking-frames, with the abstraction of the small amount of hosiery he was conscious of having possessed, being the leading facts with the public, these having but little comparative importance to his mind. A few hints about fragments of books and stones having been thrown about, caused some misgivings, and his nervous dread became strong and stronger as he went down the Castle Street and received the condolences of his neighbours. He did not

care for their commiseration, knowing indeed that they could form no estimate of his loss, when one told him that the court was strewn with old books, and another that the hooting rascals had narrowly escaped with their heads, from the great stones and bones they had come upon instead of hosiery bales. One weak little man, who was putting up his shop shutters, received the help of his strong arm gladly; and then, in his gratitude, informed him that the big old fiddle had been smashed, but he reckoned that would not be any great matter now as he was getting rather hard of hearing. Poor Cameron took the heavy shutter from his shoulder, fixed it, and seeming to shrink visibly, as if he would disappear from such a graceless world as this altogether, went home without a word or look for any of his fellow-citizens. He went round to the back of the house to take a look at the warehouse, and felt half-disappointed that it had not fallen bodily; indeed the new windows, looking so clean in their fresh paint, were rather distasteful.

Cameron opened the kitchen door with his usual sharp click and startled his old mother,

who was sitting alone, trying to make the most of the fading daylight and failing eyes. He was going to greet her with the short nod usually considered enough of courtesy for such very domestic purposes, though he had been absent some weeks; but a glance at the worn face softened him, and he said, with unwonted sweetness and solicitude, "What have you been about, mother, to look so ill and thin? Surely the scamps did not empty the pantry as well as the warehouse?"

"No, they did not touch the house; but if they had done, I have had plenty of goodness from our old friends, George. Indeed if they had stripped the house I might have found myself a better-cared-for woman than I have been for the last twenty years. People do want a fillip to remind them that they are not bound to use up every thing for themselves; but when the fillip comes I don't see that the world is very much worse than it was when I was young." Mrs. Cameron uttered her remarks as she laid aside her spectacles and the seaming, and set herself to prepare something for her son's supper.

"So you have heard all about it, have you,

George?" she added, looking at him from under her grey curls and feeling unwilling to speak out concerning past events.

"Why, you don't think I could come down Castle Street without hearing any thing bad there might be to tell about myself?" he rejoined tartly. "Why don't you call Eve to get the tea-things and sit down, you look more fit to be in bed than standing over the fire? Here, give me the toasting-fork and call Eve."

"They did not tell you about Eve, then?" Mrs. Cameron asked, with another furtive glance.

"Somebody told me Eve acted like a young vixen and tried hard to save the violono. They surely have not hurt the child?" he inquired, anxiously looking round.

"Better they had, maybe!" the stern old lady replied. "If she had been lamed she might have had something sensible to think about. Eve has run away."

"Eve run away, and after behaving so finely! Why, you might have been more gentle than to drive her away, and in my absence too!"

"I had nothing to do with her going away. We had had no words; indeed I was ill in bed. She packed up her clothes and went the second day after the riots, without giving me a hint of what was in her mind. It is my private opinion that she is gone away with that fine Mr. Serle, though no one will believe me. They walked home together, and were whispering about something at the door here; and they say she was seen on the Castle Hill about the time the coach goes out, and we know the Serles left that morning."

Cameron's face clouded, and he looked more moved than he had been even by his own personal mischances. Such anger as this did not mean a fit of passion or flash of temper. His whole being seemed to take fire at the thought of a wrong towards the weak or innocent. His youth had received a severe shock of this kind, and it had made him keenly suspicious.

His mother, seeing the contraction of his brow and the dark gloom in his eyes, said, "You had better see the Fieldings about this, after your tea. I fancy they know more than I do."

"Why did not Bernard follow them? the young fool!" George growled, pushing his chair back from the table. "He ought to have gone directly; what can one do now?"

"Finish your tea, and then go and talk to him. He does not think she is gone with Serle."

"Why, what has Bernard got in his head? Some enthusiastic notion of independence and getting her own living, I suppose. Just like a poet to imagine it must be so very right and pleasant to live on fine sentiments, while they have every solid comfort at hand. He must answer to me for Eve at any rate."

With several confused exclamations against young people in general for being so easily led astray, and against Bernard and Serle and Eve in particular for being leagued against him, Cameron hastened from his untasted meal to call at least one delinquent to account.

Bernard, hearing his voice in the hall, went out to meet him, in happy ignorance, saying, "I am glad you have returned! We are in a strange trouble about Eve."

"Why on earth did you not follow them

immediately? You might have been in town by the time they were if you had been sharp." Mr. Cameron's look and tone astonished Bernard excessively.

"How could I follow them?" he asked, with a troubled air; but speaking in a manner that seemed to his excited questioner unduly mild and heedless, who exclaimed,—

"How? why, what should hinder you? What do you mean by them? Who went with her? and what took them off together?"

"I suppose they went to be married, and my interference would have gone for nothing. I talked to Eve about the fellow, and she only mocked at me in her gay-hearted way."

"If you had talked to your friend it might have been more to the purpose. I should think you know him better than to suppose he has any notion of marrying poor little Eve?"

"What do you mean by calling that rascally young Fletcher my friend?" exclaimed Bernard, in some indignation. He could agree to Cameron's democratic ideas in the abstract, it being easy enough to have charity towards all men, when no particularly ob-

noxious individuality is set forth for the soul to exercise itself therewith.

"I was talking about San Serle. Eve is not quite such a young fool as to take Will Fletcher on her hands. Why, she had never spoken to him!"

"She knew him, however, and appeared to be looking to him for protection when the rioters were in your room."

"That may be. Will is not too old to have some gratitude," said Cameron bitterly, adding, with as little pleasantness in his tone, "I suppose young people can be civil to each other sometimes, though they be strangers. My mother is right now and then, and she has her reasons for thinking the Serles have inveigled Eve."

"Put the Serles out of your head, and just listen to what I have to say for ten minutes," said Bernard; and then he told the story of the purloined dress, so undoubtedly abstracted by Will and worn by Eve, giving Miss Elton as an authority for the satisfaction of his listener.

Cameron looked so painfully moved that Bernard wished he had held his tongue, but

he only said, as if to himself, "I wonder how it is the lower nature pulls so strongly? Eve's talent might have turned the scales on the other side."

"I wrote to San Serle," Bernard remarked, rather shyly, after a while—"and got a singular reply."

"Oh, you did, did you? Then you think he had some hand in the matter, in spite of Will Fletcher?"

Cameron spoke in a very unamiable manner, but Bernard was sorry for him, and explained gently, though he would rather have kept Serle's nonsense from those very critical ears. He took the letter from his pocket, but seemed to know the contents by heart, for he crumpled it up in his hand as he went on,—

"Serle says he should be full of regrets if the Graceful Consort were to act contrary to the wishes and designs of her best friends; thinks she possesses the essentials for taking a high place in the profession, but is crude and saturated with provincialisms. Then he goes into a despondent enumeration of the chances against Eve ever being a singer at all, these young geniuses being subject to

more ills and blights than even ordinary mortals, nine out of ten—and there are scarcely ten in the visible universe—dying early, and the remainder going wrong in one way or another."

"Is that all?" Cameron asked, attempting to take the paper from Bernard's hand, who drew it back, saying,—

"The rest is only some of Serle's *badinage*, that, of course, means nothing,"—still he coloured and looked vexed.

"I should think it is pretty much of a piece for that matter. I don't like your friend Serle, Bernard," continued Cameron, looking suspiciously from under his heavy brows. "There is something subtile in our nature; we cannot always answer for ourselves. I have done the very thing many and many a time that I have resolved not to do, and despised myself for thinking about, and have done it of my own volition too, without any of your vicar-generals to prompt or urge me on."

"You need not fear that Serle will take any such responsibility on himself, he is too self-absorbed."

"But I do fear Serle. He is at the stage

when some new motive is wanted. He succeeds too easily in his profession, and needs something hard to set his shoulder against as he makes way—I don't think he would mind if it were mischievous. You would do well to beware of him."

As a change of subject and a natural expression of his regret, Bernard alluded to the sacking of the wareroom and the destruction of his old friend's treasures.

"Ay, ay,—I suppose I am nothing better than a beggar. That poor, silly child had put the other things out of my mind." Cameron took up his hat with the intention of going to see for himself; and then asked if every thing were gone.

"Almost every thing you set much store by. Serle saved a few of your books—the old Dutch poet, for instance. If you had only seen San amongst the ragamuffins, forgetful of all his foppery and selfism, talking as only these eccentrically clever people can talk, saying just the most correctly amusing thing, and having such an amount of ready wit on hand to rivet attention and mollify excitement, you would not judge hardly of him. He is

different from the rest of the world—but so are you, Cameron, for that matter. He stood at your wareroom window, with old Jacob in his dainty hands, pointing out some of the queer pictures and looking so earnest the crowd seemed compelled to attend to him; and then he read bits of his quaint morality with his admirable style until one or two of the fellows laughed and cheered, and the place was soon cleared."

"I never said he was not clever in his way; but I should never have accredited him with any bravery of that sort. I suppose, Bernard, none of the manuscripts were saved?" Cameron asked this question—such a momentous one to him—with as much self-possession as he could muster; but Bernard's ready sympathy detected the painful anxiety which was moving his soul; for these manuscripts were the work of his past life and the hope and glory of his future.

"The manuscripts were tossed out of the window as mere rubbish and were blown up and down by the wind—"

The unfortunate author interrupted further tidings by exclaiming, in his most caustic

manner, "Ah, no great evil then! They have had wider circulation, most likely, than I could ever have given them. The fossils would scarcely share such a gay destiny; they were heavy enough, at any rate, to keep their place, and have gone through revolutions as mighty in their way as this one—eh, Bernard?"

"Those that could not be broken are safe, and the manuscript music was brought back and laid on the counter soiled and torn, but not irretrievably. The neighbours say it was Kitty Fletcher who brought it; so Will must have collected it from the feet of the crowd. But the violono—you have heard about that, Mr. Cameron?" said Bernard, with hesitation.

"Yes, I've heard." Cameron drew a sharp breath and tightened his lips, as if he need say no more and did not wish to hear more about it. "How came you to let young Fletcher get away? you know he is wanted," he added.

"Will did not seem to be of much consequence just then; we were thinking more about your favourite old viol. Serle wanted to take it up to London with him to get it re-

paired, but I fancied you would prefer seeing to it yourself," Bernard replied, knowing his friend's strong and peculiar antipathies.

"You were right. How would Serle like his unfortunate anatomy to be handled by the resurrectionists, supposing any serious mischance had befallen the thing he calls his soul? Besides, I almost think the violono is as well as it is, I should not fancy it in another man's hands, and I am sure it would never respond graciously to a new master."

Bernard cast a questioning and rather apprehensive glance towards the poor musician, but made no reply, knowing too well what melancholy significance underlay the strangely sounding words.

CHAPTER IV.

A WORD IN TIME.

WHEN Mr. Cameron got home he found Miss Elton standing by his mother and trying to persuade her to eat the little supper she had prepared for her. Every night since Mary had known how feeble and self-denying the old lady was, she had busied herself with this care and a similar scene had been gone through; the invalid protesting that if she had no appetite for ordinary food, fasting was the proper alternative, while her kindly attendant declared that it was a sin to waste.

"Miss Elton is very good to me, George; but she must not be teaching me to need company things every day," said Mrs. Cameron, tasting the grateful jelly as if she were apologizing to it for being its con-

sumer. "Now there's that poor Kitty Fletcher, Mary, she really needs a little coddling," and the plate was pushed away with a final determination.

"I took Kitty something before I came here," said Mary, in a preoccupied tone. She was aware that Mr. Cameron and her lover had met on the continent, and, longing for a word about Fred Forrest, was wishing men were not so slow to speak of each other. "If this reserved, reticent man were a woman, he would have the tact to tell me ever so much, without seeming to be at all particular and meddlesome," she was reflecting.

George was thinking about something else, though he was quite conscious of Mary Elton's kindly and graceful presence. "What do you say to going to live at Lyons, mother? I could get that agency, and your brother rather urged me to accept it and take you to him there," he said, with a look which frightened his mother, who thought she read a settled determination to drag her away to end her days in a foreign land.

"Wait till I am dead, my son," she said plaintively. "I have never lived any where

but at Framborough, and it is too late to begin with a new place now. Your father found me here, and here he left me; and I should not like to be too far off when my summons comes," she continued, with that mental inconsequence common enough with people who have had reason for relying on their intellectual strength. "You have a good old name in the town, at any rate, and it would stand you in no stead abroad."

"I don't see that it has done much for me at home, for that matter; and it is time I tried something," he replied, trying not to glance towards Mary, who was preparing to go home.

"You may do whatever you like when I am dead and gone; only wait awhile longer. You are the only one left me, and the parting will come soon enough," said she, betrayed into an unwonted exhibition of feeling by this uncomfortable project.

"Mr. Cameron will never leave Framborough while you need him," Mary interposed, quite unconscious how weighty her little word was.

George had been sitting looking moodily

at the fire and thinking. He knew people blamed him for selfishly devoting his energies to his own cherished pursuits instead of labouring against the poverty that was stealing so surely into their home; he knew he might realize a fair amount of worldly success now, if he could make up his mind to sacrifice his soul's life for the sake of certain material needs, and he had a latent idea that if he went into a strange country, completely severing old associations, this sacrifice might be completed. But Mary's remark made him look up with a new light in his eyes, and when his mother put in her plea to be suffered to remain where she was, instead of going where every thing would be so strange that she might as well be deprived of all her senses at a stroke, he received the singular impression quite graciously, saying he would make an exchange with the English agent if he were willing. Then he put himself forward to accompany Miss Elton to her home.

"Come to my warehouse to-morrow morning, Mary; I have something to say to you," said he, after he had wished her good-night.

Mary felt as if she had put a vast amount

of fervour in her response, though the assent had been given in her usual gentle way.

Mr. Cameron had been at work five hours, trying to restore the injured violono, when his expected visitor arrived.

"It will never be itself again, I fear," he exclaimed, with a sigh, as he placed it in its case.

"We must take it to some clever person to be re-strung; it must be put right," said Mary, ignorantly supposing that what man had made some human agency could restore.

"New strings will not set it right, the very soul is crushed and out of place; and see, the delicate bow I have used for twenty years is broken!" He smiled at Mary's intense expression of regret; but any one who has not been deprived of a long-used and precious grace, whether it be a cherished instrument or a God-given sense, can never imagine the forlornness of that smile.

Generous and impulsive by nature, and inexperienced in the tender pride and sensitive exactions that harass a poor man's soul, Mary exclaimed, "Oh, we can easily get another bow! Hughes is going to town in a

day or two, and if you will only give me a good maker's address, the violono shall be widowed no longer."

Perceiving by the contracted brow and heightened colour that she had spoken heedlessly, Mary said no more, but kept to her determination to replace the broken bow.

"I wish to hear what you have to tell about Eve and Will Fletcher," Cameron remarked; and then he saw how the spirit faded out of Mary's eyes and how disheartened she looked. "Never mind," he added; "I received this note from Eve this morning, so there is no doubt about her present abiding-place or what her destiny may be—so the past is no great matter."

He put the little perfumed note into Mary's hand, adding, impatiently, "I hate these abominable smells, they betray by their impudent presence the very evil they are meant to hide."

Mary read the note, and then remarked that, except for the London post-mark, there was no intimation of Eve's present abode.

"Where can she be but with the Serles?" Cameron recollected himself; there was no

necessity for using that savage tone in speaking to Mary Elton, however angry he might feel. "The poor child never thought that the post-mark would betray her; you see she has some gratitude, she thinks Kitty Fletcher would take her place nicely in waiting upon my mother."

"But I cannot understand why she should go away secretly, and with the Serles, too. That would be worse than going off to get married, as we fancied she had done, to Will Fletcher—less natural, however," said Mary.

"Worse indeed, but I don't know about being less natural," interposed the cynical Cameron. "I must go and look after the desolate and misguided girl," he added, as his reflections changed the bearing of his easily moved soul. Then he stopped suddenly and frowned and shut his lips tightly, as if he had made some great mistake, and then muttered his detestation of things in general, and of every section of San Serle's fantastical little body in particular.

Mary did not see the excessive misery of the case. "If Eve is gone with the Serles, most likely she fancied she could get on

faster in her profession. She did seem very anxious about that, and they are rich, good-natured people. Bernard Fielding has known them a long time," she said.

Cameron could not see with her youthful, kindly eyes.

"Serle deserves flogging!" he persisted. "If I had not made that promise to the hosiers to look after this agency business at once, I would go to town to-morrow and fetch the child back."

"I will go and call upon the Serles and see Eve, if she be there. Our foreman is going on business, and will be all the better served if I am at hand," Mary exclaimed. She was really pleased to have an external reason for accompanying their man of business, knowing that it was a duty which had devolved upon her, but not feeling quite ready for the sacrifice without some little grace. After the first surprise at such a proposal, and a slight objection to the idea, Mr. Cameron accepted with grateful appreciation Mary's kindly intervention. She was sure to succeed both with Serle and Eve, he thought, if, indeed, any interference could avail.

This having been settled, the interview might have come to an end, but Mr. Cameron had had another object in asking Miss Elton to see him in his ware-room that morning; and she was not yet satisfied. No word had come to her of Frederick Forrest since his informal farewell two months ago; and she was aware that the two gentlemen had passed some time together since she had seen either of them. She suspected Mr. Cameron had something to say about this, and his reticence pained and perplexed her. Very likely her speaking face was looking disappointed or wistful, and it seemed that Cameron perceived what was passing in her mind, for he said, with some gentleness, "Forrest and I travelled homewards together for some distance. I thought he was coming by the same packet, but he suddenly broke away, saying that he could not come home without seeing Paris, that would be too great self-denial when he was so near."

When he had repeated what he thought a strange remark from Mary Elton's lover, he waited for her reply with more interest than he would have appear.

She did not seem alarmed yet, simply remarking that he could not very conveniently come home while the Cummings still occupied his house.

"I should have thought the farm would have been a tie, if nothing better had drawn him." Cameron could not restrain the sarcasm even for Mary's sake. She saw his meaning, and smiled as she glanced up, such an assured, satisfied smile her old friend was driven to speak more plainly, to give at least one well-meant warning word. He was at a loss to put it in deftly, and began rather ambiguously.

"Mary, I fancy few people have known you longer or better than I have. Of course that gives me no claim to your regard, children generally escaping from the familiar bond as soon as they think they can go alone. You were Susan's playfellow as well as schoolmate—do you remember how inseparable you were, and how you used to vex me by trying to evade me in your walks?"

"To be sure I remember; why, it is not so very long ago!" she answered, not understanding his aim now in the least.

"It must have been a very long time ago. I felt like a boy then, and now look how grey I am! and I seem to have lived through everything."

"I am very sorry," said Mary, and her eyes were even more pitiful than her words; for she knew how great his trials had been, and feared there were worse troubles in store.

"You need not be sorry on my account. I had no idea of complaining. It was of you I was thinking, wishing that you were just a trifle grey and old too, that you might have passed through some of the hard, bad times that will come, Mary."

It was a delicately moulded and softly tinted face that looked up to his rugged one; a face that seemed as if it could not have any relations with time and sorrow, as if the soul that animated it would convert every experience into a comfort or a joy before it could lay a blight or furrow there. Yet Cameron did not like the trustful, sisterly light that beamed from her beautiful eyes; she seemed to defy disappointment and to be perfectly assured of his old friendly regard, while he knew disappointment was coming, and would,

with all his heart, have substituted for the old friendship some very different sentiment.

"That is not exactly what I meant to say to you, though," he added, when her inquiring gaze had become rather difficult to meet with silence. "I wished you to understand that I shall always be ready to help you in any way. Don't forget me, that's all, if any unforeseen trouble should come in your way."

This was sufficiently depressing, though rather incomprehensible. Mr. Cameron was eccentric, but not generally disposed to meet troubles half-way, and certainly not in the habit of throwing clouds of a sentimental nature in any one's path. But as Mary had quite enough to think about without dreaming over unpleasant possibilities, and as her own concerns were habitually those which concerned her least, she led the conversation back to Eve, and, after learning some trifling particulars as to the course she was to take in her mission, she went home to prepare for the next day's journey.

Mary Elton was of an age that is usually sufficiently self-reliant, ready to believe in her own judgment, and to defy the world if antago-

nistic. As her word was becoming omnipotent at home, in consequence of the painful and stringent duties that had devolved on her young head, there was no one to gainsay her will. It was therefore arranged that she should be the principal in the London expedition. She was no stranger there, and she did not feel ignorant in the matter of the business of the house, having frequently been her father's companion in his better days. Bernard gave the address of the Serles, and Mrs. Fielding promised to keep little Harry out of harm's way.

CHAPTER V.

SAN SERLE AT HOME.

IT was the height of the London season, when music and life and, consequently, the Serles were in great force. They were entertaining a professional party at their own house on the evening of Miss Elton's visit, and her humble cab having been mistaken by the attendant for the conveyance of some invited guest, Mary was taken without any warning to the drawing-room. A snow-flake falling amongst the heat and colour and perfume of a tropically-appointed hot-house would not make much impression therein, but it would suffer much discomposure in its own state of being; and Mary's appearance was almost as anomalous when, the door being thrown open and her obscure name announced, she stood in this brilliant London

saloon. The travel-robed and modest maiden stepped into the midst of a full-dressed and full-voiced party when she had expected only to meet Mr. and Miss Serle, Bernard Fielding's friends. It was rather confusing, particularly as she could not explain her singular and unlooked-for appearance in this public way. Mary's spontaneous good-nature had often amused her friends and led her into little social involvements, it was so perfectly free of any selfish or personal considerations; and now she was laden with a large paper bag of Framborough cakes, Miss Serle having expressed her fancy for them. They were light, and proportionately fractious, and so forced their passage through the bag at this very unseasonable moment, presenting themselves with as little ceremony as their bearer had shown in appearing before this august assembly. Mary met Miss Serle's good-natured though amazed smile; but before she could speak San came forward and led her very courteously out of the room. She had not recognized him yet, he looked so subdued in his plain black clothes; and his languor, which was not without some tinge of

humour in the country, seemed plaintive with these severer appointments. Even in the midst of her perplexities Mary thought of his sentimental expression, given with his utmost simplicity of manner, "I fade in London," and she thought he was right. Dinorah Serle certainly did not share this tragic peculiarity; she evidently bloomed bravely in town. Its atmosphere must have been congenial; for as she sat at her piano, the brilliant centre of her radiant company, Mary noted with surprise how glowing her complexion had become, how grand yet gay her demeanour was. Nevertheless she was very natural and kind when, her brother having left Miss Elton alone, she came to her into the little ante-room for a few moments and gave orders for her refreshment. There was no chance of asking about Eve, and Mary was left to herself for half-an-hour. She was getting very tired of waiting, and beginning to wonder whether these fashionable people intended to see her again, when Mr. Serle returned and appeared ready to hear her concerning her errand.

"We have lost Eve," she said abruptly,

"and we think she came here with you and your sister. May I see her alone for a few minutes?"

"Dear me, Miss Elton, I had no idea you were such a brusque little person! Your style was quite different down at Framborough," he said, with provoking indifference to the subject of her interest.

"Please let me be, and suffer Eve to speak one word to me alone; then I will go away immediately."

"Don't you see how your impetuosity is carrying you away? You are assuming that I am harbouring one young girl, almost a total stranger, and impugning my hospitality with regard to another charming and impromptu visitor. Do let me give you a glass of wine."

"No, thank you. Of course you must do as you please, Mr. Serle; but I know Eve is here, and if you persist in denying her, I cannot help it. Somebody else will come who may not be put off so easily."

"Dear Miss Elton, I have no idea of denying any one; but I cannot endure the *staccato* movements in society. Suffer me to have

my own slow way, and I do not doubt the issue. May I ask what reason you have for supposing we have appropriated the Graceful Consort?"

"Because you would not take all this trouble to evade if you could say, truthfully, 'Eve is not here.'"

"Ay! Assumptions generally rush to their conclusions, and so are self-destructive. You do not know me. I would take any amount of trouble to prolong an agreeable interview. We professional people have so little choice in our social intercourse—at least we are apt to think every thing is forced upon us by the exigencies of our art. Is this your only reason for presuming that Eve is here?"

All this, said in Serle's most deliberate and careless way, was very irritating after Mary's wearisome journey and long waiting. She answered, rather at random, that as she entered the drawing-room, just after the footman had announced her name, some one hastily rose from a seat by Miss Serle and left the room, and she believed this person was Eve. Mary had not time or self-pos-

session to notice particularly and drew her inferences from probabilities.

"You deserve to succeed," Serle said, admiringly. "Your wit is as adaptive as it is spontaneous. May I ask if you are well-cared for in town? We have not much spare room in our little nut-shell of a house, but my sister is clever at inventing ways and means, though they cannot always be carried out." Serle was perfectly good-natured with all his self-love, and would willingly have given up a night's rest rather than see a lady in a difficulty.

"My room is engaged and my cab is waiting at your door, thank you. I am sorry you have given yourself the trouble to fence with me in this way about Eve. We should not think of compelling her to return to Framborough if she preferred remaining with you, and especially if you desire her to stay," Mary rejoined, with some dignity, and making her parting salutation with more decision than gracefulness. She would not compete with the gentle, elegant Serle.

He put his fingers over his brow, as if to concentrate his ideas, and looked perplexed.

Then he asked, with unusual force, if Miss Elton would favour his sister with her company at breakfast the next day at twelve o'clock.

Thinking she saw his drift, Mary's smile returned, and she said she would come.

"Probably twelve may seem a late hour to a country guest. My sister and I cannot look upon this London world in its morning-wrapper; and perhaps then we might prevail upon you to spend a few hours with us," he said, as he rang the bell for the servant to take Mary to her cab.

The next morning was given to business, and Mary did not forget to look out for a good bow for the violono. She was at the Serles' door soon after twelve. The house was like its mistress, intended chiefly for evening effect, and so had an incongruous appearance in the sunshine. The ground-floor, being given over to the servants, did not tend to favourable first impressions. Mr. and Miss Serle had an idea that the morning air was not healthful, and, as their voices were the chief concern and purpose of their being, all the arrangements of their

existence were made accordingly. The day was spent in making ready for the night; and after some practice in this mode of living, it had become as natural to them as it is to owls and moths. But this perverted order of things did not agree with their domestic prosperity so well. They could not well inquire after the in-coming or out-going of their property; and nocturnal habits, by reason of some singular contingencies, being the more expensive, they were not so rich as they might have been with a trifle more common sense between them. San was an amateur cook too, and of necessity his dainty performances required extremely dainty appointments, with every novel and expensive invention. The house was luxuriously comfortable and made to suit their especial requirements, though a country visitor might have liked a little more room. The drawing-room was large and commodious enough—this was indispensable, for they had numerous musical parties and various instruments—but the dining-room was small; Serle, having an idea that going up-stairs was injurious, had partitioned a portion off for his own sleeping

apartment. The two rooms could easily be thrown into one, when a refreshment-table in a recess, richly decorated and draped, was all that was required by their guests.

The delicate breakfast was laid in the smaller room, and there Mary Elton was shown to keep her appointment. No person received her, so she sat down and listened to the sound of a wonderfully fine voice accompanied by a few notes from a harp. That was Eve's voice, she knew; but there were a few marvellous tones interjected now and then which she did not know. It was easy to infer that Eve was taking a singing lesson from some grand voice.

Presently Mr. Serle came, in all his morning glory, resplendent from last night's funereal repose. In addition to the well-remembered gay and silken attire, he had put on a scarlet embroidered fez and slippers to match, and a variously-coloured scarf about his waist; and, as if the man were as identical with his clothes as women usually are with theirs, the old free and careless demeanour was there again. He was the indolent, fantastic San Serle, wit or wisdom appearing with him

such chance concerns, so unexpected and so simply entertained, as to lose much of their point before reaching their mark.

He addressed Mary as though this were their first meeting in town; and, having put by all the previous night's subterfuges, said frankly, "Evalina Serle is having her singing lesson, so we must beg you to wait upon the will of her master. Signor G—— is so great a personage, he could only undertake to give us ten minutes twice a week, and it is his whim to come before breakfast; we are, however, very glad to get him on any terms."

"Indeed? I should not have thought Eve needed any one after Mr. Cameron—and with you." The final clause was an afterthought of Mary's.

"Of course Dinorah and I could prepare Eve for most things; but, you know, our public has not risen above advertisements, and Signor G——'s name will be a puff of price. Then our concerts are much more exacting than provincial ones, and Eve must make an impressive beginning or we shall never retrieve ourselves."

Whatever his motive was, Serle evidently

had decided upon dropping all mystery about Eve, even explaining how the idea of taking her to town for the purpose of bringing her out had originated, and laughing over the charge he brought upon himself. "I really thought that poor Cameron would be glad to be so well rid of this increasing responsibility," he said; "and as I do not like trouble and legal arrangements, I preferred this quiet way of carrying out my purpose. You must know, Miss Elton, I have always been used to have my own way, and contradiction is irritating." While he talked the singing lesson came to an end, and Eve entered the breakfast-room with nearly as much nonchalance as Mr. Serle had shown.

The greeting she gave Miss Elton was shy and reserved, as usual, though when Dinorah came she seemed quite free and happy with her, and assisted at the breakfast with an easy grace very surprising at first. Very soon, however, even Mary, with all the responsibility and weight life had already attached to her, found herself falling under a sort of charm; every thing was so informal and kindly, so free and yet so refined.

Mr. Serle was very attentive to his quiet Framborough guest, and proposed that they should drive her about to see the finer part of their much-admired neighbourhood. On their return callers began to come, most of them clever or captivating or odd; and while listening to their pleasant and pregnant talk, it seemed as if the world's hard lines had been smoothed down and its ways made sweet and flowery. None of them stayed long, except some controverted passage required trying over before the Serles' higher criticism; and all brought in an enlivening breath from regions of a special and animated existence. Scarcely a quarter of an hour passed without manifesting something new or interesting—presents from the great of fruit and flowers, notes to be read and answered, musical drafts to be glanced over, operatic suggestions to be pondered, beautiful sections for scenery and bits of professional appointment, involving criticisms and witticisms without lack or limit; and the tables were well filled with books and poems, printed or in manuscript, craving the honour of a friendly acceptance. No wonder if all this, going on in an apartment

with every luxurious and elegant appliance, seemed very charming to these two young girls, whose lives had been spent so differently. To Mary Elton it was a rich, intellectual paradise, and it was with difficulty that she could rouse herself now and then, to think that she had yet some business to get over, and must have some definite report to take to Mr. Cameron of Eve's probable fate.

Though host and hostess were too well accustomed to make a visible toil of their profession, they knew a certain reserve must be made. So soon as their room was cleared, San Serle, with as much gravity as the importance of the ceremony demanded, bade all be quiet for half an hour while the process of renovation went on; Dinorah covered him with some delicate fur-rug, and then took Eve and Mary to her own apartment to rest and dress.

There was something very surprising in the mechanism of this dainty little house, such a benign law regulated the order and inspired the servants. Perhaps they too had caught some stray influence of a diviner sort from the artistic abundance of the master's life, and were the better for it.

As they sat at dinner Mary was impressed by a most perplexing resemblance in Eve's air and modes to some other person's with which she was perfectly acquainted; and it took the poor, friendless, homeless Eve quite out of the order in which she had hitherto appeared to move. Surely she could never have been a forlorn and desolate waif compelled to wear sordid, misfitting frocks and to eat the bread of charity! There was such a fair aptitude for things refined and orderly, an affinity with her pretty dress and present delicate surroundings, that seemed far more natural than the former state of things at Framborough. Mary felt quite bewildered, and watched her with intense interest. She could scarcely eat any dinner herself after this idea had entered her mind, feeling very much as if she were in a nightmare sort of existence, from which she might awake to some positive horror. After dinner, when they returned to the drawing-room and a few intimate friends dropped in Mr. Serle played the harp and Eve sang. This was one of the Serles' home evenings, and all was easy and full of a quiet grace; and San was quite exquisite, teeming with feeling

and his strangely quaint sentimentality. His long white fingers touched the strings as if there must be an intimacy of a most delicate kind between them, they made such a tender, appealing harmony; and Eve's singing was finer than ever; she had made great progress even to Mary's thinking, her rendering being evidently more pure and intelligent.

Still Mary wished the singing would cease, that she might get a word or two with Eve, some more definite idea of her and the future she was preparing for herself; and presently she was glad to see the girl move quietly from the circle and, after standing apart till Mr. Serle had begun one of his own songs and was independent of her, come and sit down on a low ottoman close to her. Fearful of saying anything lest she should be startled away again, for she seemed on far less easy terms with her young townswoman than with her new friends, Mary only took her hand and held it affectionately, waiting for her word. Presently, while the visitors were warmly applauding Serle's music, Eve asked, hurriedly,—

"How did Mr. Cameron bear all his losses and misfortunes?"

"Pretty well, dear; but I think your going away rather softened the other misfortunes."

Eve's eyes, lighted up with warm feeling, met Mary's, and were like a beautiful revelation as she exclaimed, "Oh, Miss Elton, do you think he cared about that?"

"I am sure he cared very much; and it was he who guessed where you had gone to and with whom you were staying. He would not believe you had gone with Will Fletcher."

"Surely no one believed that of me!" Eve cried, an indignant flush spreading over her face.

"Some of us thought so," Mary replied, quietly, and holding fast the hand that seemed about to be snatched away. "Mr. Cameron was quite ignorant of your acquaintance with the Fletchers, and could scarcely credit even Mr. Fielding's report of your intimacy."

After a brief silence, during which Eve sighed one moment and looked angry the next, she nodded towards Mr. Serle and said, laconically, "He told me the Camerons would be glad to be so well rid of me, now that I am grown up and business is so bad."

"I am convinced they felt nothing of the kind. Mrs. Cameron has been ill ever since you went away; and Mr. Cameron would have come for you if he could have spared the time just now."

"Did he really send you to look after me?" Eve asked, with such happy eagerness Mary regretted that in truth she must say, "No;" but she added, instantly, "I am sure he will be very glad to see you back at Framborough, and so shall we all."

"I don't think so." Eve spoke with quick and frigid decision, and would have withdrawn her hand, but Mary held it firmly and spoke gently, as she asked, "Why can you not believe that we had learned to care for you? It would only have been natural to love you, if you would have let us."

Glancing over her pretty and becoming dress with a flush of pride, Eve smiled; and then, as suddenly, a shadow of pained humility fell over her, and she said, "Oh, no, how could any one really care for any one who was such a figure of fun? I must have looked like a great mistake in a child's frock and pinafore."

Mary could not restrain a smile at this discriminating bit of self-satire, though of course she replied that clothes were of no consequence, it was Eve's self that people cared about.

"Oh, but clothes are of great consequence, especially when a person is neither one thing nor another. I am sure no girl is like herself in frightful things."

"Never mind now about that, dear. Just tell me if you would like to return with me to-morrow; I should be very glad to take you."

"Did you come on purpose to see me and to ask me this?"

"Not exactly on purpose," said Mary; and then, seeing the blank look that succeeded the eager one on Eve's expressive face, she added, "I should not have come if it had not been for the chance of seeing you."

"And does Mr. Cameron know you are come?"

"He knew that I meant to come, and if you return with me he will be pleased."

"Ah, but, I cannot go back with you, Miss Elton. I am very comfortable here—

quite happy enough, and getting on with my music and singing, people say, better than I ever could at Framborough. Now good-night, and thank you."

"Stay a moment. Is this all I am to tell Mr. Cameron?"

Eve paused. "Need you tell him any thing?" she asked.

"Of course I must. Do you really think a girl can be lost sight of and no one care? Mr. Cameron is a very kind man, with real, warm feelings, though he does not make much fuss about them. He was very good to you, I think."

Mary raised her voice slightly in her earnestness, and so drew Mr. Serle's attention to them both. He had not indeed been too much absorbed to disregard this seeming conspiracy against his guardianship of the young singer; and now he left his harp and admiring friends to ask what plot against his domestic peace was going on.

"I was asking Eve if she would return with me to Framborough," the straightforward young ambassadress replied at once.

"And I was saying I preferred London.

It is to be my home, you know, and I must like it best," the more diplomatic maiden added, as her eyes sought Mr. Serle's in order to make him understand that no more need be said.

"Then you are not going to desert me, Evalina! I was afraid when I saw you two whispering together—for I have no confidence either in myself or my fellows when there is much at stake,"—he rejoined, glancing from one to the other as if he really feared they were about to out-manœuvre him.

"No, I will not leave you just at present: you are very kind to me; but I may wish to go sometime. And now that they all will know where I am, I should like Miss Elton to thank Mr. Cameron: he has been very good to me, and I never did thank him."

"Of course Miss Elton can do so. But have you told her that we must not have any more interruptions? Framborough and its people must be as if they were not, until our wings have grown, Eva. I would particularly recommend that your worthy mamma should be kept in ignorance of your present home."

Mary's astonishment at this admission of

so important a personage as a mother for Eve, was very evident. Eve looked much annoyed and covered with confusion, as she said, "No one knows I have a mother; she was only mentioned to you in the strictest confidence, because I did not feel right about coming here so clandestinely."

"I am very sorry, indeed!" Serle exclaimed, looking as though he had made a vital mistake never to be atoned. "I am such an unguarded person, especially when all is innocent and fair around me. Dinorah knows all about it," he added, looking so comical in his distress and yet so pathetic.

Mary laughed first, and then reassured him by saying she would not be a mischief-maker if Eve wished her to refrain.

"Oh, I don't suppose it signifies very much now," Eve remarked, after a minute's reflection. "Mamma wished me not to say any thing about her while I was at Framborough, —for my own sake, she said, even more than hers; but now that I am so far off, and Mr. Serle knew before, it is no concern of any one's."

"Certainly not, provided she does not

follow you here. Miss Elton must be so good as to understand that Evalina is quite aware that, though we rather approve of the maternal institution in particular cases, they must not be too prominent and usurping. Is it not so, my dear?" Serle asked, his lisp and manner making him appear full of a gentle simplicity, though it was plain that he and Eve were not wholly simple and single as children of light in this matter.

Mary did not like this suppressive arrangement, it appeared unkind and unnatural. Her shrewd common sense perceived that something strangely and disastrously inconvenient must be involved, and she could not like the new move in Eve's life, especially under this fresh mystery. She said she could not imagine why Mr. Cameron, who had a good mother of his own, was to be kept in ignorance of Eve's mother.

"She had been very unfortunate — and people don't respect the unfortunate," Eve explained, as if she would say no more.

Serle smiled at the young opera-singer's conception of the world's policy. "I see we need not clip our pretty Eva's wings; and I

am glad of that," he said, as he turned from the two girls to rejoin his friends, who were listening with perfect satisfaction to his sister's music.

"But, Eve, is it not cruel, especially if your mother has been unfortunate?" Mary asked, as soon as they were alone, and trying to meet Eve's averted eyes.

"Poor people have to do and bear things without thinking about feelings, Miss Elton," said Eve, with so much restrained feeling and decision Mary perceived that nothing more need be said. In a few minutes she took her leave.

CHAPTER VI.

LOOSENING LINKS.

"HOW have they been getting on at home all this time?" was Mary's anxious question to Bernard Fielding, whom she met just turning away from her own door. She was sufficiently tired and depressed to apprehend some additional evil, and could scarcely refrain from running up the street when she saw her familiar home.

"I think they are all as usual, but I did not go in; it was you whom I wanted to see, thinking you must have returned last night. Tell me about Eve; have you seen her?" Bernard replied.

"Yes; she is with the Serles and happy, at least to all appearance. Will you go and tell Mr. Cameron now, and say I will give him the particulars to-morrow?" said Mary, wish-

ing to hear the home news from her mother first.

"Stay a moment. You will, perhaps, see an old friend at church to morrow. The Cummings have returned to town and the master of Wyckam is at home again." With his knowledge of Mr. Forrest's faithlessness, Bernard felt that was only right to prepare Mary for what might be.

Never until that moment had Mary suffered herself to doubt Mr. Forrest's good faith; but now Bernard's news seemed like a conviction that she had been living in a state of fatal delusion for some time, and that the end was at hand. There was a sad humiliation and fear at her heart instead of the joy that ought to have been, and the morrow's meeting was anticipated with a painful sense of uncertainty.

Before the congregation could leave the church Mr. Forrest joined Bernard in the organ gallery; and after waiting through the voluntary he asked him to walk through the Wyckam fields with him.

They were half-way to the hall before either spoke of any thing but the beauty of the

weather and its effects on the farm. Then Mr. Forrest remarked, "I did not see Mr. Elton in his usual place; is there any change there?"

Bernard merely said, "Mr. Elton seldom goes to church now."

"Then I suppose Miss Elton is quite indispensable at home. Some one mentioned her going to town on business, I think?" Mr. Forrest spoke with perfect indifference, but seemed to expect a reply.

"I have heard that Miss Elton went to London to look after Eve, who disappeared a few weeks ago. But perhaps you do not recollect Mr. Cameron's young singing maiden, Eve," Bernard rejoined, coldly. He was thinking how profoundly selfish this man must be. He can commit a cruel wrong and find it good because it suits his purpose.

"Ay,—Mr. Cameron's little foundling! What could have made her run away? Where could she run to?" Forrest ejaculated, with evident interest and some sign of anxiety.

"Eve seems to have got weary of her quiet obscurity and went away with the Serles. That is all I know."

"It was ungrateful and thoughtless. Do you know much of the Serles? and are they to be trusted with Eve?" Mr. Forrest asked, with a sudden care that surprised his companion, who replied,—

"Why, you are as captious and suspicious as our friend Cameron. Is a man to be accredited with the baser motives at the first brush?"

"Did you say Miss Elton had seen Eve?" Forrest asked, musingly; and, without appearing to note Bernard's pause in their walk and his scrutinizing look, he added, "I should like to know what Miss Elton's impressions were of Eve and her new home."

Quite mistaken in the motive that was moving Forrest to this strange regard for the poor singing maiden, Bernard suspected he was scheming to bring about an interview with Mary that might seem unsought and so issue as he would, without involving him and his dignity. At any rate, he need not be a hindrance, so he said, "Miss Elton has promised to drink tea with mother this afternoon, and if you please you can meet her then."

Mr. Forrest did not directly accept the

invitation; he was absent and thoughtful, and strolled along as people do on sunny spring Sundays by the sweet, bowery hedges in the flower-sown fields, only his face had not the easy Sabbath expression, but was rather careful and secular, Bernard fancied.

The grey stone pillars of the old portico of Wyckam Hall were in sight, when Forrest remarked, with a sudden brightening, "They tell me Cumming had become fond of this place, and even talked of making me an offer for it."

"Yes, so I heard; and it seemed to me rather presuming to covet a country gentleman's house over his head; not quite accordant with the politics of his profession."

"I was flattered, at any rate, and shall read his speeches with especial zest now, they will smack of my woods and fields. Wyckam will be a classical spot henceforth."

"Ay. We are calling this very field-path by his name already."

Bernard was about to wish his companion good-bye, when Mr. Forrest asked him to sit on the stile five minutes and listen to a proposal he had to make. Deane, the organist of St. Mary's, had sent in his resignation;

did Bernard think Mr. Cameron would accept the office?

Bernard was afraid his friend's strong and uncompromising nonconformity would be an objection not to be overcome, otherwise it would be a most happy resource.

"The salary is a good one for a country town and the organ is a first-class one. Cameron ought to have the first refusal; and surely he would not let any such trifling scruples stand in his way! It would be foolish and unkind to his aged mother. I feel sure I could get it all settled for him, only he always seems averse from accepting any thing at my hands. We do not look for conformity in a musician, you know," Mr. Forrest said, a kind, well-meaning smile driving away the gloom from his face.

"I fear Mr. Cameron will not think so; he is so severely refraining, especially if a trifling compromise with conscience would be of any worldly advantage. Now that organ would be such a boon in itself, to say nothing of the salary, he would most likely regard the offer as a temptation to be sturdily resisted."

"Perhaps so. I have always entertained

the highest respect for Cameron, though I must say I do not always understand him. People who do not *profess* to be of any creed or Church must expect to be misinterpreted sometimes." Mr. Forrest spoke from the point of observation natural to an ordinary mortal.

"I will propose the matter to him to-night and give you as my authority," said Bernard, as he turned homeward.

"You will manage better by keeping my name in shadow," Mr. Forrest replied; and his judgment was right.

That Sunday afternoon Kitty Fletcher was sitting close to the fire, for the May sunshine had not enough genial warmth for her poor wasted frame, and she shivered even then, wrapped as she was in a woollen shawl and in her good neighbour's cushioned chair. Her father sat by smoking and thinking, casting now and then a troubled, peevish glance at his daughter; for, though she was dear to him in his own fashion, he was sometimes out of patience with her for not mending, as he had declared she would mend, when the spring days came.

Kitty was always glad to see him get that little black pipe; it was the one resource that kept him at home when the frame was silent, and it was the only medium through which she could be taken into his confidence. She was talking to him about her brother, who had not yet reappeared.

"He is with his Aunt Sophy, child, if you must know," Dan said, gruffly, after having been pressed as to his hiding-place.

"Is my aunt living near Wyckam, father? She was talking about the housekeeper at the hall the last time she was here."

Why Dan Fletcher always appeared irritated when this proper-looking old hall was alluded to was a fact that often puzzled Kitty. She would have liked to ask why he disliked Wyckam and its master so unreasonably, but Dan had an inflexible temper and a countenance that reflected it, so his children never got within the circle his morose and reserved disposition had apparently formed.

This errant Will was a terrible burden to poor Kitty now, in her increasing weakness of body and despondency of spirit, and she persevered in asking questions about him

which kept the friendly black pipe in a state of suspended animation, sometimes requiring her to rise with unwonted alacrity to relight it. Dan was good-natured enough to see that he was doing his ailing child some service, so suffered her to talk as she pleased.

"Father, what does Aunt Sophy's husband do for a living?" she asked, drawing her great cushioned chair nearer to his elbow. "I have many misgivings about him, and think it must be bad for Will to be so much with a fine-gentleman sort of man who has no business that people can look into. I have heard say that he never seems short of money, and yet he does not live before the world like a straightforward man who need not be ashamed to look any body in the face."

"I have nothing to do with your aunt's husbands, child. They are no kin of mine," Dan replied, in a singular, ambiguous way. "I keep out of their road, I do, and would just as lief Will did too; but he's like most o'the young 'uns, would rather be at any body's beck but theirs as has a right to them. I guess you'd be off too if you was equal to it." Dan, fond of his girl in his own way,

smiled grimly as he said this. He was wishing she was equal to it, and was even ready to give her the fillip.

"There's only one way for me, you know, father, and I have no leading in the matter. I don't think I would leave you if I had," said Kitty, her gentle resignation slightly tinged with regret when she realized the leaving this lonely, gloomy father to his own melancholy lot. There was indeed a strain of melancholy in this family. Dan was a misanthrope in general feeling, and had an especial hatred for one or two individuals, Mr. Forrest and Mr. Cameron especially, though no one could tell why. It was most likely a morbid necessity for some excitement that was always leading Will into difficulties; while Kitty had for years wavered between fanatical piety and religious despondency.

Her father could not bear these allusions, so, to change the tenor of their talk, he remarked, with unusual urbanity, "I never reckoned the captain a regular husband of Sophy's, I never did. She may reckon him what she likes, and she may choose to be guided by them as ought to mind their own business. But

she was always a poor forgiving and forgetting creature; a fool of a woman, with nothing but her voice and her handsome face to hold by—and they left her when they'd done their part and brought her to ruin. I'm right glad thou'rt not in the way of being tempted. Thy voice is no better than a linnet's, and thy face——" He paused, for a furtive glance at the face under consideration revealed such a frail, spirit-lighted beauty he was cut to the heart, and smoked on in miserable silence.

In a few minutes Miss Elton knocked at the door, and as Dan admitted her he passed out, having a strong objection to lady visitors.

Mary opened her little basket of good things and tempted Kitty to partake, while she saw with regret how rapidly she was wasting away. She talked meanwhile about Eve, and gave a kindly message with which she had been charged.

Pleased by this evidence of Eve's remembrance, and not supposing any harm could result, Kitty told about her relationship. "We are own cousins," she said, "and Eve's

mother, who is my aunt, lives near Wyckam. I have been in trouble about our Will for some time, but father has just been telling me that he is with my aunt, so he must be out of harm's way—don't you think so, miss?"

Mary was so much surprised at this announcement she could say nothing, but wonder why this relationship and the fact of Eve's mother being alive, should have been kept as a secret.

"Does Mr. Cameron know?" she asked, half instinctively; "for surely he ought not to have been deceived."

"I don't know: Eve always wished him not to know about us. But I shouldn't wonder if Mr. Forrest is aware of Aunt Sophy's relationship—leastways his housekeeper is, for I have often heard my aunt talk about Mrs. Bray and say she was kind enough to her, which she could not be, without her master's consent and knowledge."

Kitty was too intent upon making her case good to think about any breach of confidence or probable consequences, but the exertion of speaking so much made her look more

frail and suffering, and Mary's tender soul was touched to pain, overpowering her interest for a time in Eve's affairs.

"I am afraid you have been worse than we thought you were, Kitty," said she. "Have you been suffering very much?"

"No, thank you, Miss Mary, not very much yet; but as the neighbours think I am in a decline, I hope I shall have my share of pain before I go—it will only be right, you know," Kitty replied meekly, the shadow of a confused, but profound philosophy passing over her pale, reverent face; she had some latent misgiving that she, so obscure and helpless, might be overlooked in the marvellous greatness of the general system of Providence, and sharp physical pain would surely be an evidence that she was not forgotten.

"Never mind what the neighbours tell you; what does the doctor say?" said Mary, feeling very sad, that this complete hopelessness should be permitted.

"I have no doctor; father understands herbs and says he can cure me if it is so to be; and if not, why doctors can do no good, and only put obstacles in the way. The neigh-

bours are all very kind, Miss Elton," she said, with a little warm glow. "There is a poor widow-woman who comes every day and does up the place for us; and while father was keeping out of sight she shared whatever she earned with me. She says she knows by many signs that I am not long for here."

Alas, there is much to make one serious in this dull indifference with which the poor so universally speak to each other of the probabilities of life and death!

Being no disputant, but feeling keenly that youth ought to be hopeful, and generally possesses the germs of life in the ascendant, Mary tried to dissipate these forebodings, and reminded Kitty that she had great need to get well again for her father's sake and Will's."

"Of course for their sakes I should like to get well, but there are those that know better than I do what's for the best, and my wishes might be making a confusion, you see. I do wish Will would come home and settle to something. Don't you think you could talk to Mr. Forrest about him and get him

to remonstrate? It is so bad for a young man to be doing nothing; and I am afraid that Captain Jones will do him no good."

"Who is Captain Jones? I never heard of him," Mary asked quickly.

"Aunt Sophy's second husband. I don't know any harm of him myself, but people say he is a black-leg, which means, getting money by gambling, I think; and it can't be quite honest, though perhaps, as father says, it is only a sort of speculation."

"That certainly cannot be good for Will, and if I have an opportunity I will make inquiry about him. I am afraid, however, there will be no chance for me." Mary sighed as she spoke, for the thought of her engagement to the master of Wyckam—so very unstable as this engagement was proving itself—was sufficiently depressing; and another reflection had occupied her mind latterly—how could her disordered home ever spare her?

"Mr. Bernard Fielding might perhaps help," Kitty suggested. She had heard of Mr. Forrest's intended marriage with Miss Elton, and did not understand how there could be any

difficulty in consulting him on any subject, not being learned in the more delicate shadings of the relations of lovers towards each other. "He has been to see me two or three times, and sings his beautiful hymns; you know how fine it is to hear him! and how good he must be to sing for a poor girl like me who cannot even thank him for it! If I could but think as he does about things, that all is for the best and we need not fear what we cannot understand, what a load would be taken off my heart! What a strange thing it is, Miss Elton, that we cannot believe what we wish so much!"

How Mary longed to help the poor little soul whose agony was so clearly seen in these great wistful eyes! "Surely," she thought, "there is enough suffering here, in this pain-stricken and feeble frame, with all these privations and anxieties, without the misery of a misdirected faith!" But Mary could not help much; she was often in a cold obscurity herself.

"I will ask Bernard to come again," said she; "and I am sure he will like you to ask him about these things. He knows better

than I do what to think and what to say. Now I must go, or I shall keep people from their tea."

Bernard met Mary in the Castle Street and told her Mr. Forrest was at his mother's and was going to stay till the evening service. He wondered how Mary would like to meet him in this way, and thought it right to warn her. She flushed warmly but walked on with him in silence, scarcely knowing herself how she liked the arrangement, but not thinking she could oppose it. Some curious complexity of ideas induced her to ask if Mr. Cameron were there, too. She had not told him of her London mission yet.

"No," Bernard said. "We must have him after evening service to ourselves." He was thinking his friend Cameron and Mr. Forrest were more agreeable apart.

CHAPTER VII.

A LOVER'S GOOD-BYE.

DOUBT and fear glided away from Mary's mind after the first few moments of this new meeting with her lover; and she sat down with that indescribable sense of calm and safety which convicted her of having doubted and feared very much. It was so charming, at first, to sit in the same room with this composed, intelligent, and manly being after having been accustomed to that poor wrecked presence at home; so exalting to feel that this was the man whom she was bound by the mighty law of love to honour now. Mary could not rouse herself from this sweet calm to join in the animated talk that Bernard and Forrest kept up, about the things the traveller had heard and seen; and as Mrs. Fielding sat silently by, with

tranquilly folded hands, Mary felt free to think or dream as she listed—and a very rich and gracious hour she made for herself. The soft south wind breathing over a garden, spring besown, would perhaps create some such flush of life and glad surprise as she was feeling, while the courtly and urbane and handsome Forrest glanced towards her from time to time; for the early days of her happy love, when there was no sense of insecurity, could not afford any thing of this wonderful and vital happiness that seemed immortalized, like other earth-born experiences, by its temporary ruin.

Bernard was not so well satisfied. Knowing from Mr. Forrest's self-convicting letter that he had, at least, been disloyal in thought to his betrothed, he was surprised at his choosing to meet her for the first time in this way, and still more at his manner, which was as free from consciousness of any tie having ever subsisted between them as it was from a tinge of cool indifference.

After tea, when Bernard went to his organ service, Mary remembered her home charge. "I never leave them on a Sunday night,"

said she, colouring, in reply to Forrest's question about going to church.

For the first time a slight shade of confusion passed over her lover's manner, and he hesitated before proposing to accompany her to her own door. Slight as this shade was, and covered instantly by his extreme appropriateness, Mary felt it, and a revelation, that could never again be shut out, threw a change over all her life, as painful as it was rapid and unlooked-for. Declining his courtesy with some dignity, she was half-way home, still quiet and apparently untouched—for some natures seem almost to lose their hold on our ordinary state of existence before a keen, hard blow—when Forrest's light step was heard, and, though she quickened her pace, he overtook her and entered the house without a word on either side. Mrs. Elton received him with her matter-of-fact welcome, and then, nothing doubting, left the pair to themselves.

Mary was not reassured, but rather bewildered; and she stood by the table taking off her gloves and bonnet and never thinking of the strangeness of letting her guest ponder in silence over her total disregard of

his presence. Yet she saw him, and felt with him, all the time—felt that she was in a most benignant and beautiful presence, and that if it were withdrawn her life might as well go out too.

With an air as appreciative and courteous as ever, but certainly with none of the spirit that had made him so triumphant in former days, Forrest began to talk about the journey to London, and inquired about Mr. Cameron's young *protégée*, the strange maiden with the voice.

Mary told the story of her visit to the Serles and her interview with Eve rather mechanically, but with coherence enough to satisfy her hearer, who thanked her for her kindly interest. ("I went for Mr. Cameron's sake; he was so troubled and anxious.") Her candour was rather spasmodic, and not very gracious; she did not know how little so. Suddenly recollecting Kitty's information about Eve's mother and request that she would help to get Will away from his mysterious uncle, Mary said, "We have found out that Eve has a mother who is living somewhere near Wyckam, and that

she is related to the Fletchers. Is it not strange that Eve should never have mentioned this?"

"Perhaps Eve did not know; or she may have been wrong," Mr. Forrest said, after a momentary pause.

"Yes; Eve knows. She mentioned it the other night; at least, she admitted it after Mr. Serle had spoken of her mother in a chance way."

"Then Serle knows? What did he tell you about her?" Mr. Forrest looked anxious for a reply.

"Mr. Serle said very little. It was Kitty Fletcher who gave me the particulars."

His bright blue eyes had an unnatural keenness in them as he tried to meet Mary's look, and ascertain how much she had been told. Too much pre-occupied with her own thoughts to note any thing peculiar in his anxious interest in this matter, it was easy to state just what Kitty had said, and ask if any thing could be done to induce Will to give up his present idle life for his proper home and some creditable occupation.

"And is that all?" Mr. Forrest asked,

with something so like a sigh of relieved anxiety on one subject and an utter indifference to that which had agitated poor Kitty, Mary felt roused to wonder; and for once she did not admire this cold lover of hers. Roused from the dull, chill monotony of her disappointed feelings, she recollected suddenly that her father might enter at any moment; and with this new insight into Mr. Forrest's want of genuine regard for the heart he had once thought it worth while to woo and win, she could not bear that he should see how low her poor father had fallen, and what a coarse, uninteresting trouble had settled amongst her own familiar surroundings. Every thing seemed to take a tone from Mr. Forrest's critical and fastidious disposition, instead of her own tender and forbearing one, till she wished with all her heart that he would go away before Mr. Elton came home and his humiliation was fully exposed. There were no signs of his going away, and, though all had apparently been said about Eve's mother, her strangely unwelcome visitor sat with as much ease and grace in his chair, as if he

were the most considerate, as well as the most fair and courteous, of men. The emergency was becoming more and more stringent. At one time she was on the point of telling him all; getting through the worst at once was more in accord with the exigencies of the hour than waiting for a disgraceful revelation, or even a lingering, doubting ignorance of what he might choose to be and do.

"Mr. Forrest, I have never seen you since that last night!" she exclaimed, with unnatural vehemence, as a beginning of a full confession of her own changed position and an absolution from his duties and claims towards her, if he chose to be absolved.

"No; but there has been no opportunity. I only returned last Friday and you were from home then," he replied, with as much composure as if no vital question were at issue. Probably, to his mind, there were no issues of life or death in the matter.

"I was not thinking of your keeping away so long and saying nothing about it just then, but of the terrible things that have happened to us since that last night."

Fred Forrest could not restrain a smile of gratification at this repetition of the all-important "last night," it was so evidently a high time in the maiden's calendar. Yet if he had really known how pathetically she regarded that last night of his lovership and of her father's sanity, how it was indeed to her the date of her death to all fair and happy feeling, he would, most likely, have afforded her a sigh, perhaps a tear, or a more perilous consolation still; for his heart was tender enough when the haze of his own self-regard permitted the troubles of another to find it out.

"Never mind telling me any thing," he said, gently; "I think I know all you wish me to know; and I went away so suddenly because I felt the shock so much, and thought you would rather not see any one just then. People are in the way sometimes."

"How could you think so? Of course we could not want strangers, and they did come out of curiosity; but you or Mr. Cameron or Bernard were old friends, at least so I thought, and surely you know

what a friend can be!" Mary exclaimed, the recollection of how much she had suffered because of his overstrained consideration either of her or himself, giving a glow of indignation to her pale and speaking face.

"But you had Mr. Cameron and Bernard," added the refined egotist, not quite pleased by this combination of valued names, and even showing that he was piqued. Some feeling held him strangely in check; he was evidently not ready to appropriate all poor Mary's circumstances, and yet could not accept any mediators. "Perhaps it would be better to let the past rest; at any rate, we do not gain much that is good or beautiful by disturbing turbid water, Miss Elton."

While the blush of hurt feeling and outraged sentiment was tingling on Mary's cheek, the street door was opened noisily, shuffling steps came up the passage, and a thick, quavering voice called out for supper for the dog, tired, faithful Jem. Mary raised pleading, deprecating eyes towards her companion, and saw the involuntary expression of disgust and apprehension with which he was listening.

"Come this way," she exclaimed, with a tone and gesture of authority he had never seen before, as, opening the glass door that formed part of the window, she stepped into the little flowery court beyond. "You had better wait there till I come back," she said; and, returning to the parlour, she closed the window and drew the muslin curtains carefully before it, shutting her weak-souled lover in amongst the jasmine and roses while she went to meet the miserable and debased being who was a loving father to her still, though he had blighted her life so sadly.

Every night Mr. Elton came into his dining-room to wish his family good-night before he went to bed, and, painful as the ceremony was, his wife and daughter would not have had it omitted. It seemed to be the one tie to the better nature of the man, the sign that he belonged to them still and would not omit the old habit of courtesy.

Mary stood ready to receive him, and Mrs. Elton followed him in. It was his custom to return earlier on a Sunday night, either of his own will or the consideration of his companions; and he sat in his great easy-

chair sometimes for hours. This heavy, insensate presence was a most wretched conclusion of the poor women's Sunday evening, looked forward to with dread and endured because they dare not, by word or sign, make the unfortunate man feel that he was a trial to his own people. That Sunday night, however, he could not be borne with, and yet how was Mary to get him away, so that Mr. Forrest might retire with dignity and comfort. She knew well that if he came forth while this father sat there, apparently so stupid and immobile, he would be attacked instantly by an irrepressible burst of sentiment, remorse of the most extravagant kind mingled by the strangest flights of a disordered fancy, that he would be held, perhaps, by the coat collar and questioned and congratulated about herself, till she would be distracted by shame and fear. And how would he ever endure the maudlin and grotesque travestie of every thing that was respectable and good, this autocratic imbecile would beset him with?

"Father, you must go to bed to-night," she said, with so much decision of voice and manner he turned quite sharply upon her and began

to upbraid her with filial ingratitude and more than common cruelty. His high-pitched voice trembled and he shook his stick in her pale face; and little Jem, hearing his master's excitement, came bounding and barking in, ready to fly at the aggressor, until, seeing that his enemy and his kind and gentle mistress appeared to be strangely combined, he whisked about the room in a state of wild dismay, until, reaching the glass door, he perceived that some one was close at hand and began to bark and snarl as if he had got the right culprit at last. Mary made a desperate effort to catch him at the risk of being hurt by the furiously conscientious little creature. Mrs. Elton meanwhile made her husband understand who was waiting to be liberated, for he exclaimed, in a loud voice, "Mr. Forrest—oh, yes, to be sure! my Mary's husband that is to be; why is he hiding there? It is not honourable, Mary, my girl, and I don't believe in skulking lovers. I never was ashamed of showing my face, though, to be sure, every body is not coy, and perhaps circumstances alter manners as well as cases."

Mr. Forrest heard every word, and his

hand was on the window fastening, for he was disgusted and intended to walk out and make his farewell bow to this disordered family, when Mrs. Elton took her husband's arm and led him forcibly from the room. Trembling with miserable excitement, Mary opened the glass door and stood before her lover like a convicted culprit. Only unkind, when his own self-love was in question, Mr. Forrest was instantly softened and tried to leave some little comfort behind, if it could be done without self-compromise. He had been gathering some of Mary's flowers in the moon-lighted court, bright jasmine stars and myrtle, thinking of her, of the clear white purity and strong constancy he knew to be so characteristic of her soul; and, be the consequences what they might, he must present the little posy with a gracious word and smile, she looked so pitiful and yet so sweet.

"Forgive me, dear Miss Elton," he said, putting the flowers into her hand instead of taking it, as he had been used to do in the happy love-making days—"keep these; not for my sake, for they have nothing in common

with one so sullied and unreliable; but if my word and memory be of any value, perhaps when you look at them you may not regret so very much that you once knew me and thought me worthy of your love. For, look, I have another little posy just like yours, which I shall never lose, as I can never forget that your pure, sweet goodness has saved me from a shameful wrong, to you chiefly."

His singular confession was sufficiently incoherent, for he was too much affected by his purpose to be rhetorical; and to his listener he was quite unintelligible. She fancied he was trying to make the blow fall as softly as possible, for she was quite prepared now for his desertion. Glancing at his face, which was very expressive always of his mood, she saw that it was as sorrowful as her own could be, and not at all angry or proud; and, fancying it was all on her account, she said, as calmly as her trembling lips would speak, "Do not trouble trying to explain. I know that we can never be the same again. All is changed; and it is enough to have one wrecked household. Good-bye, Mr. Forrest."

She was hastening away, for it was impossible to restrain her tears any longer, and weeping would be extremely inappropriate just then. He was, however, bent upon explaining his position, and caught her hand as she was opening the glass door to escape into the dark, bowery court. Looking into her large anxious eyes, he said, with unusual ingenuousness, "With all my zeal for my own happiness, I don't think I am so selfish as to cast another stone on thy hapless head, Mary. Egotistical and fastidious I have always been, and too ready to gratify myself at any price, and, I admit, scenes like this of to-night would make my life intolerable, but it would be more on your account than my own, or rather through you that I should suffer. There is another reason why we can never be any thing on earth to each other. I thought I could tell you the whole truth and suffer you to hate my name. Will you believe that I would defy any evil fate rather than add to your sufferings? Will you believe that if I were to say more now I should be more base and selfish than if I suffer you to ascribe my conduct to utter heartlessness?"

Two or three times Mary had tried to interrupt him by saying he must of course act as he thought best, and beseeching him not to trouble his life for her sake. When he had ended she replied to his equivocal questions quite as equivocally—she would take his word as he wished.

CHAPTER VIII.

REFLECTED LIGHTS.

AS Mr. Cameron walked with Bernard Fielding after evening service, he was perfectly aware that the peculiar buoyancy of his own spirit, and the fair Sabbath calm that was glorifying old Framborough, were in great part due to Bernard's hurried declaration that Mary Elton had met Mr. Forrest that afternoon, had spent an hour or two in his company tranquilly, and without any apparent signs of being blighted or broken-hearted; though, in his opinion, all was over between them. This jubilant feeling was of course very gratuitous and absurd, and perhaps cruelly selfish; for how was he likely to succeed such a fine gentleman as Frederick Forrest in a lady's regard? Yet he could no more help being glad at this

little gleam of sunshine on his love than if he had been one of the world's most favoured ones. Who does not know what glorious passages a little word will discover? How congenially the book of life opens at the psalm of blessing!

Bernard had noticed the sudden brightening, and, not understanding the cause, said, with some feeling, "I wonder why you don't feel indignant and sorry as I do? Mr. Forrest may not be worthy of Miss Elton, but she was satisfied and happy, and now she will believe in no one any more."

"What nonsense you poetical people talk! Does it follow that because her eyes have been opened she will see no more good in the world?" Cameron asked, rather Pharisaically, then seeing the personal application of his words, he would not be betrayed into making any more remarks on the subject.

"Have you seen Miss Elton since her return from town?" Bernard asked, after a pause.

"No; how could I? she only returned last night. What news did she bring?"

"She found Eve comfortably-settled with

the Serles, and apparently inclined to stay with them. They are kind, and Eve seems happy."

"No doubt! But does Miss Elton think everybody may be and do what they like? What a singular game at cross-cradle life would be, so regulated!" said Cameron, in a tone of indiscriminate pique.

"I don't see how Miss Elton could interfere. You must go yourself and claim Eve, if you don't believe in San Serle," Bernard rejoined, leading his companion past his door for some further talk.

"The child has taken herself away from me and my control, so I need not make a personal grievance of the matter."

Mr. Cameron turned quickly and was going into Bernard's house, when he interposed: "I have a little proposal to make to you, and shall be glad if you will walk a few minutes longer."

Mr. Cameron had been too eager to see Miss Elton in her renewed emancipation to wish to walk farther.

"Cannot we talk in the house?" he asked, opening the door for himself.

Mrs. Fielding was alone, and he soon learned that Mr. Forrest had gone home with Mary.

This extinction of his gratuitous though fair hope, was so sudden, Mr. Cameron suffered his disappointment to overbalance everything; and he looked so moody, even Bernard, who was considered particularly impervious to the signs of a lover's disquietudes, folded his hands tightly and looked silent and impenetrative. Though Cameron was not a man to care about an unwarrantable outbreak now and then, either before foes or friends, he was more reserved about the causes of his mental fevers; so, after making an inconsiderate attempt at an abrupt departure, he changed his mind and sat down, saying, with an evasive allusion,—

"I am vexed with your popinjay Serle: he has lured Eve away from a safe home; and there is no knowing what the mischief may be next." He felt that he had found a safe and legitimate subject upon which to cast his wrath.

"It was not honourable of San Serle, I admit, even if Eve made the first overtures.

Still it may be for the best. Miss Elton says Eve has a mother living near us; and, as she must be rather an exceptional person, perhaps Eve is as well quite out of the way," Bernard replied.

"Does Eve know her mother?" Cameron asked, without any sign of surprise at the tidings.

"Yes; but she did not name her in the first instance, and cautioned Miss Elton against speaking about her at all; but Kitty Fletcher told more particularly this afternoon, and spoke of some relationship."

"I am sorry it has come out; but it is just what one might expect when a set of women are concerned in a secret. I was positively beginning to think that no one had any right over the child, but the man who had quickened her musical genius; it was time I was undeceived."

Mr. Cameron was speaking cynically, but Bernard saw that some real feeling was impelling him; so he merely remarked, reflectively, "I have often thought that musicians, more than any other artists, inherit the soul of their masters. We must be their very

children, or how could we be their true interpreters?"

"There is something in the idea more than poetical fancy. That child apprehended my music more readily than would have been possible otherwise. She will come back to me."

Bernard, as much astonished as he was charmed to find his own cherished theory shared by this sensible friend, fell into a musing mood, until, suddenly recollecting Mr. Forrest's commission about the organ at St. Mary's, he proposed that they should canvass for the purpose of electing Mr. Cameron as organist. "St. Mary with her organ is at your door: will you open your heart for the sake of our profession?" he asked.

"I dare not open to her. I am only human, and weak in the presence of a great temptation."

"But why should you deny yourself this festival of music every Sabbath day? Your spirit would be a true leader, Mr. Cameron, and you know how glorious that would be."

"Could I lead the spirits of St. Mary's, think you? Should I not be a knave to lead

them if I could? Why it would be the blind leading the blind, and with malice aforethought."

Mr. Cameron spoke with such sad determination Bernard could only express his regret and say, "I told Mr. Forrest you would refuse, but he was anxious that I should make the attempt."

"So this Forrest is in the foreground of my affairs again!" Mr. Cameron muttered, peevishly; and then he ended the discussion by walking out silently by the back door of his friend's house, leaving Bernard to wish he were as well regulated as he was wise.

The next day Mr. Cameron's business called him to the county town. He usually drove a hired horse through the by-lanes; and as he must pass very near to Wyckam Hall he determined to see Mr. Forrest on his way and question him about the young vagabond, Will Fletcher. He found Mr. Forrest at breakfast.

No one could deny that the master of Wyckam was a most kindly and hospitable man—a fine example of that old-fashioned courtesy that is so rapidly passing away.

To people in a congenial and happy mood this was gratifying; but if the slightest shadow of ill-will fell across the intercourse the courtesy might seem overstrained or deceptive. It must be acknowledged that, though falseness does not gain fairness by being ever so graciously paraded, blunt and ungentle manners do as little towards favouring honesty and truth. When Mr. Forrest received his early visitor with as much politeness as if he had been the honourable statesman so recently a resident at Wyckam, Cameron's gruff bearing set him at once at a disadvantage.

"Fortunately we are rather behind time this morning, and the coffee is not cold," Mr. Forrest said, glancing pleasantly from the traveller to the good things on his breakfast-table. He reseated himself as though denial were impossible.

"I breakfasted two hours ago, and came only on business."

"All the more reason why you should join me. Tea-cups are sure to promote talk."

"The women think so; but I can say what I have to say on my legs. You need not

take any more trouble about the organ at St. Mary's on my account. I cannot accept it. And now I want to know where you have put Eve's mother, Sophy Fletcher?" Mr. Cameron had not studied his speech; but if he had tried to startle all self-complacency and graceful ease out of this urbane gentleman, he could not have succeeded better. Mr. Forrest looked unpleasantly surprised; then gently defensive.

"It was a sin and a shame, Cameron, I admit; but you know how dependent she is, and you are both clever and good," he said.

"A very sufficient reason for being imposed upon! However, that is no matter; where is the woman living?"

"Will it not suffice if she promise to keep quiet? Eve has left you, is gone to take lessons in London, I am told. Her family cannot signify to you now." Mr. Forrest was casting furtive looks towards his questioner's angry eyes as he replied.

"The woman may go to the flesh-pots of Egypt as fast as you like, for any thing I care. It is her nephew, Will Fletcher, I am looking for; and I expect he is with her,

learning to be ruined, and close to your door."

"But I don't know any thing about young Fletcher. Sophy is married, and not likely to be keeping a nephew about her."

Mr. Forrest was speaking truthfully; but Cameron did not think so. "I suppose you are aware that it was through those young rascals, in the first instance, that poor Elton went wrong? but perhaps you had as lief he kept wrong if it can afford you an excuse for being a scoundrel," he remarked, savagely.

Forrest winced; but, not knowing what would be right to say, he held his tongue and received another instalment of righteous wrath.

"I tell you I know nothing about it. If Captain Jones has got hold of Will Fletcher, he will keep him as long as he chooses," he said, at length.

"Perhaps so; but as I am not afraid of Captain Jones, I shall go and see."

Mr. Cameron was going away, intending to take measures for discovering the captain's place of abode, and full of indignation against Mr. Forrest for his reservation, when the

perplexed and insulted Forrest asked, "What do you want Will for? Perhaps I could find him if I tried."

"I want him to make a clean breast of that burglary at Elton's. People suspect the old man of leaving his door unfastened to entrap the young thieves, and say the homicide was in design, as well as in fact, a murder. I want Will to confess to having unlocked the door himself. I know he did so, and his confession might restore Elton to himself again."

"Well, leave the lad to me. I will unearth him if I can," said Forrest, with more sincerity of manner than he had shown hitherto. "He shall go to your warehouse in a day or two, or I will send you word concerning him."

Mr. Cameron was obliged to be satisfied, for people of the strongest and most pertinacious disposition must sometimes succumb to much weaker characters, gentleness being so hard to overcome.

Cameron lost no more time at Wyckam, but he was kept all day at the county town, and it was late before he started homewards.

Those by-lanes were pleasant enough in the sunny spring morning, but dreary and lonesome at night, and not suggestive of cheerful anticipations; for there were many crossings and intersections and plenty of evil precedents. On one spot, where four roads met, the barbaric midnight funeral of Dan Fletcher's miserable brother had taken place, and people said all sorts of suggestive things about the locality. At another opening, close by the tall white guide-post that stretched its one long arm ominously towards the dreadful machinery, a murderer had been gibbeted, and the chains still rattled in the night wind. The whole neighbourhood was invested with disreputable romance or weird interest, that made even strong-bodied men with susceptible nerves shun it at night, or thrill uncomfortably if their way were necessarily in that direction. These were, indeed, the notorious Fen Lanes, the classic ground of Dick Turpin's lawless adventures; and the hoofs of his famous Black Bess had rung many a time on the stony path between those high, untrimmed hedges. One of Turpin's dens was close at hand, and a part of

the wonderful animal's stable still remained, a matter of which the wrong-headed villagers were proud.

In this very neighbourhood Mr. Forrest rented a small farm; no one knew exactly why. It was too far from his own land to be worked conveniently, and he did not attempt to bestow much labour upon it. He had built a small farm-house—or rather added a few rooms to an old tumble-down cottage which had been honoured in its day by all sorts of evil gossip. It was still a remarkable example of the accumulative power of a bad reputation; and even now, though it was in the hands of a very genial and courteous man, and the sun shone upon it as brightly and purely as upon any other farm homestead, people would rather not pass its door, and no one courted the acquaintance of its new tenants. Dick Turpin's precedents still lingered in the air. Highway robbery was not only remembered and talked about by cosy firesides, it was actually in force, and seemed not likely to be repressed. The old Fen Lanes kept up strangely their occult and lawless characteristics; for a successor to the

great freebooter had arisen, daring, clever, and invincible as the original. Farmers of sober habits had been stopped on their way home from the fairs by some dexterous and strong assailant, and compelled to deliver their gold or suffer extreme penalty. Either the farmers understood how useful a virtue discretion is, or the robber had a singular and superhuman knack of gaining the better of the victims, for no serious personal violence had hitherto been committed.

No one voluntarily passed through these lanes, after night had settled over them, and Framborough was as easily reached by the regular turnpike-road. Still as Mr. Cameron had gone through them in the morning he never thought of changing his course and having to pay the toll-bars, just because it might be the safer plan. So at the half-way house he turned off the high-road and drove his light gig and hired horse rapidly and fearlessly through these ill-famed lanes.

About half a mile from Frederick Forrest's lonely farm-house the canal runs parallel with the road for a short distance; and the traveller had to cross a bridge which spans

it. The arch is high and the turn has to be made abruptly, and close upon the steep descent. Mr. Cameron was not a cautious driver, though he knew but little about the capacities of his horse—he made too sharp an angle in turning, and discovered his mistake by the time his little carriage reeled over and fell flat on its side close to the edge of the canal. He was thrown out, fortunately not too near the water, and he was not much hurt; but the horse was apparently too wise or too much entangled to rise. He made no attempt, but lay still amongst the rushes, as if it were no concern of his. Cameron saw how it was, for the moon was shimmering over the water; there was not space for struggling, and the only plan for getting the animal on its legs again was to get it out of its harness. The moonlight was so fitful he had to feel for the buckles, and to keep the straps separate that he might know which was for its part when they were to be put together again. He put some parts in each pocket, and some in his boots and hat, making himself a great amount of trouble in his ignorance of horse accoutrements, but his

memory and mechanical skill served him well; and he kept up a low, musical whistle to soothe the abject creature, which was evidently disposed to trust him. At last, all being taken bit from bit, he pushed back the gig cautiously, when the horse rose, as if the experience were by no means new, and walked quietly towards the hedge, where it stood as if assured that with such a master it had only to be passive and all would come right in time.

Seated on a stone, wholly intent on straps and buckles, and more puzzled than if he had been sitting in judgment over a Runic monument, Mr. Cameron was quite indifferent to the evil character of the locality, when his attention was withdrawn by a jarring vibration which he could not understand. His helpless companion knew all about it, and neighed as if to intimate that a fellow-creature was in distress. In a few moments the sound of horses' hoofs coming quickly upon him struck his nerves with a singular sense of unreadiness; and before he could collect his straps and rise, two travellers were close at hand. Thinking they would be sure to help him to

get his equipage into working order, he shouted as they rode up; but they only slackened their pace while passing. The foremost rider, a stout, dark-looking man on a great black horse, passed very close, and seemed to take rather a more scrutinizing look at the broken-down traveller than he ought to have done if he did not mean to help him forward. As soon as they had gone by, the horses seemed to be urged rapidly onward, and they were lost in the darkness instantly. Whoever the strong, imposing, gentlemanlike person was, Cameron could only conjecture; but he felt sure the younger and slimmer rider was Will Fletcher. He strained his ears to detect the flying sound, and it ceased so suddenly to jar upon the stony way, he felt convinced that they had turned off at the gate which led up to the lonely farm-house.

"So this is the redoubtable Captain Jones, is it? I wonder how he manages to keep two such horses as those, and what he is training my young Will-o'-the-wisp for?" Cameron muttered, as he pulled at a difficult buckle with his teeth. "I'll have him to-

morrow, at any rate, if I sit here all night on purpose."

After several mistakes and much patience the harness was at last put to rights; and shortly after midnight Mr. Cameron was again moving, more cautiously now, because he was by no means confident that his work might not fall to pieces again at any moment. He had plenty to think about, however; and as he passed Wyckam Hall a sudden conviction lighted up the whole affair. Frederick Forrest's remarkable connexion with the disreputable farm-house, and harbourage of this mysterious army-agent who called himself Captain Jones, — his apparently heartless conduct concerning the Elton family, and his unwillingness to assist in bringing Will Fletcher up to account for himself—all appeared plain and accountable, though very exasperating to the direct and honourable Cameron.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LONELY FARM-HOUSE.

THE ill-bestead farm-house in the Fen Lanes had been more than usually dreary and comfortless that night. Its only occupant, the dejected mistress, had languidly removed every thing from its place without having had energy or skill to pack, in a properly condensed form, the goods that were to follow her, wherever she might settle. All had issued in a total confusion of ways and means; for Sophy Fletcher's ideas were never very consecutive, and when any thing real had put her out she could not tell how the commonest concerns of life were to be ordered. That afternoon an unusual visitor had called, with a stringent and stern purpose of turning her and her family out of house and home. She and this gentleman had known

each other when he was a gay, thoughtless boy, an only and a wilful son, and she a bright, beautiful girl, with a voice that would have made her fortune if it had not been so early marred. His will, once her pride and pleasure, was now her cold, hard misery. The thought was a bitter one, but she was not vindictive, and gave way sadly and patiently. Sophy did not trouble herself about her husband. The relation had always appeared rather a mythical one to her mind, and he was so strong and self-reliant and so mysterious withal, that it could not signify much if he were turned out of house and home, she imagined.

Tired out with this work of packing, and wishing she had not converted the bedding into that huge bundle so prematurely, Sophy had sunk down upon the floor, resting herself as well as she could against it, and was just falling asleep, when a sharp rattle on the door from the handle of a riding-whip roused her, and she answered the summons with all possible haste. This was the only matter which her easy-tempered husband showed the slightest sternness about. She must lose

no time when that tattoo was beaten, and she must ask no questions, no matter what appeals there might be to the feminine qualities within her.

Husband and nephew dismounted while Sophy stood within sight; and each walked in leading a jaded horse through the sitting-room. They passed into an inner apartment, and then along a passage of some length; and thither Sophy followed, standing by with a light while the saddles were taken off and some grooming done, as if she were too well trained to be weary at inconvenient times. When they returned to the kitchen the master looked round in amazement at the signs of disturbance, but took the explanation very calmly.

"Oh, if it is only a whim of the governor's there could be no need for all this hurry," he said, seating himself at the table as if the board would be spread through any fate. "I hope you are not going to send us off without our supper, Madonna? we are more than hungry to-night."

This strange pseudonym by which Captain Jones liked to call his wife, was not used

with any sense of irony, though he was fully acquainted with her former career. She was his lady, and he admired her; the fragile, faded beauty, the languishing, negligent air were in such contrast to his own bluff presence, which could not be otherwise than portly and sufficing, that he felt complimented and refreshed. He did not know much about abstract laws of any kind, and it was satisfactory to have the opinion of others better qualified to judge of womankind; and Sophy's precedents were assurance that she was not without certain fascinations.

Will Fletcher took the tidings of their ejectment much more to heart. He enjoyed his life here pretty well; it was better than dozing existence away at Box Court or vegetating behind a counter, he thought; and if the days were rather close and monotonous in that underground stable with the horses, the nights were varied and lively, and he liked the captain and his aunt. Jones told him to be comforted; it was nothing but a storm got up for the purpose of clearing the atmosphere, and would soon blow over. He did not mean to be touched by it, and as the

lad had shown himself so deft and gentle-handed, he might go and feed the horses without fearing that it might be for the last time. He liked a tender hand to things that could not defend themselves, he said.

As soon as Will had retreated to that singular stable, the captain asked his wife more seriously what the governor's motives were in getting up this sudden movement.

Sophy coloured and whispered some explanation, as if with reluctance or shame.

Her husband patted her cheek good-naturedly and told her not to mind. She might go up to town for a month or two; he could manage without her till he felt at liberty to follow or have her back, when the wind changed again.

Sophy felt rather dreary at having to go forth alone to make a new home, having naturally supposed that her husband would accompany her. She was easily depressed, and felt but small assurance as to the future. "You are always so deep in one thing or another, perhaps you may never think of joining me," she said, dismally. For poor Sophy was sometimes burdened by the doubt

that their bond of union was not a very regular one, and she even apprehended that this very capable and imposing captain might feel at liberty to break through it at any time. What his life had been was a mystery to her, but he was quite good enough for her, whatever it had been, she thought. There was at least a sense of comfort and security under the shelter of his strong, worldly wing; it might be vulturine, for any thing she knew, but she had nothing to fear from the talons which were hidden for a time.

However matters might develope, the guidance of her own destiny had been relinquished when that early irretrievable step had been taken so thoughtlessly; the consequences of which had always appeared strangely disproportionate.

Early the next morning, in accordance with orders received, Sophy started, intending to meet the coach at Framborough, Captain Jones undertaking to see to the remainder of the packing; perhaps in the belief that some order might evolve from this chaotic state of the household when the disturbing medium was removed.

Sophy had to pass Wyckam Hall, and, whatever risk she might run, it would be too unnatural to leave the neighbourhood in this way without a parting word with her old acquaintance the housekeeper. Mrs. Bray had been uniformly sympathetic and good-natured, though in her own patronizing style, so a few minutes were saved for a friendly farewell.

There were signs of unusual disquiet about the complacent housekeeper, though she was sitting in her own room with unwonted leisure on her hands, and lingering over a forlorn, cold breakfast. An air of outraged dignity hung about her, and an unseasonable refinement pervaded her dress. Clean and neat she always was, though with the order of an upper servant. Now there was an amplitude in the flow of her muslins and a scent of violets was exhaled when she moved as if her starching had been perfumed.

Sophy's news of her sudden removal did not produce the anticipated effect. Mrs. Bray listened in an absorbed, absent way till the scheme of going into lodgings in London was mooted, when she brightened up and

remarked that she really did not see why they should not go together and open a lodging-house themselves.

"Why, you said the other day Mr. Forrest's engagement with Miss Elton was broken off. What must you leave for, if he is not going to be married?" asked Sophy. "What has put you out?"

"I'm not put out, I'm going out of my own free will. I don't wait to be sent away. I can bear a good deal when it comes in the course of nature, but not insult from any living man!" Mrs. Bray exclaimed, putting her handkerchief to her eyes, though they were too angry for tears.

"Surely you don't mean the master!" suggested Sophy, in a frightened whisper; "you always said he was so good to you."

"Ay, good as a rattlesnake—drawing you up with his affable ways till you believe in him, and then stinging you! You know his way, I should think," said Mrs. Bray, jerking her innuendoes at her visitor ruthlessly.

Sophy quivered, but did not feel called upon for a reply.

"Of course he always behaved to me like a

gentleman," Mrs. Bray resumed, "or I should not have been here. But it is just your fine-born gentlemen, who have only one smooth white side to turn to the world that are to be dreaded, as you know."

Sophy's spirit rose a little this time, and she remarked, with feeling,—

"I did not come here this morning to have you flying in my face. It is time I was going, at any rate."

Mrs. Bray, without heeding the interruption, resumed her argument: "Give me a man like that soldier-thing that stands for a weather-cock on the barn. He turns a white side or a red one, as the wind blows." Then, recollecting her duties of hospitality, in which matter she very rarely failed, Mrs. Bray subdued herself and set about preparing some breakfast, saying, in her natural tone, "The coach does not stop for any one as is behind time; and you would not get to the office if you ran all the way. Have a comfortable cup of tea and stop where you are till to-morrow. Four and twenty hours can't signify if you are not found out; and I'll guarantee that."

Sophy thought this would be a more comfortable mode of beginning her new course, and agreed to stay. The wily housekeeper, entering into further particulars over their tea, explained the cause of her disaffection with Mr. Forrest. Having heard that his engagement with Miss Elton had come to an end, like all the previous ones, certain high-coloured ambitions which, by fits and starts, had enlivened her servitude at the hall, began once more to set her horizon in a glow. Mrs. Bray was still a fine-looking woman, and she knew that this was no small advantage: she was Mr. Forrest's junior by a year or two, and did not yet show any sign of being touched by the potent hand that does not always grace as it touches. Her position was a menial one, but this would enable her all the better to manage the servants and make the place presentable. She would be the more likely to give up sometimes, and the master had been used to his own way so long, and had spent his life so much as if he were an immortal sort of butterfly, he would never be content to stay always by one blossom, and might as well settle where he would not

be snapped up and lost. It was thus she discussed the situation and threw light upon her fair designs with some wisdom, though of a certain professional sort.

Sophy listened, not in surprise, for Mrs. Bray had indulged in these dreams before; but the climax was rather unexpected.

"Then, you know, my dear," said Mrs. Bray, more definitely, "I never was to say vulgarly born, and always feel in my proper sphere when giving orders and driving people before me. Thinking that there was no time like the present—for when once a gentleman like the master is set on marrying he does not sit down to sigh over the ashes of a lost love, but sets at once to kindle another flame—I began to make my first advance. I did this as delicately as possible, only putting on my afternoon gown in the morning and doing out my hair instead of covering it with a cap. Then I told the housemaid to set two cups and saucers when she laid the breakfast in the dining-room. I was going to give a trifling explanation, but fortunately stopped in time; the pert hussy gave her head such

an impudent toss and simpered as if she had found something out. Of course I felt a little nervous and did not like to take the head of the table all at once, so I sat down to a bit of sewing and waited for the master. Well, when he entered the parlour he looked at me as if he had been the east-wind in person and was come to wither me up. Then he asked, in a jeering tone, 'if my room was smoking again;' I had given that reason for sitting in the parlour once or twice, for I do think when there are only two respectable people in a house it is a poor story if they can't sit in the same room sometimes—fellow-creatures indeed!"

Mrs. Bray sniffed so scornfully and looked so lost in disgust at this idea of the social system, Sophy, fearing she might lose the development of the little domestic drama, said, soothingly, "Well, dear, and how did it turn out?"

"He just took his place at the coffee-pot as usual, while I was feeling too damped out to offer to fill the cups; and indeed I was quite too tremulous, and was thinking what a very difficult thing it is for a woman to

take the first step—I don't believe, my dear, it will ever come into fashion. 'Whom are we expecting for breakfast, Mrs. Bray? Is Miss Lawson in the house?' asks the master; and I could feel how scornful he was, and smiling to himself all the time. 'Nobody is expected, but I thought as there are only two of us to sit down, we might as well have our meals together, and save the servants some trouble, sir,' I said, all in a flutter; and certainly I could not have sat down with him then if he had pressed me ever so.

"Well, he made me no reply; he did not even look towards me, but rose up, as if he had been my lord, and pulled the bell-rope with that violence the rosette came down on his head. The girl had been listening at the door all the time, for she entered in a moment, all in a titter. 'Prepare Mrs. Bray's breakfast immediately in the housekeeper's room,' said he, quite calm, but impressive; and then he seemed to see the insolent smile, for he gave her notice on the spot, saying, 'If you have not time to wait on the housekeeper we must get some else to do it.'"

Mrs. Bray had scarcely finished her narra-

tive when the firm step of the offending master was heard in the hall.

"We will keep quiet," said she, in a whisper; "he won't come in here, you may be sure; and I don't feel equal to meeting him at present."

She was called, however, and in a tone that required an answer; and she went to take some orders for the day.

Mrs. Bray's temper was not mollified when she came back. It was adding insult to injury to treat her as if nothing had happened when her whole soul was outraged. She declared it was not to be borne, and she would go and do her packing at once.

"But where shall you go?" her companion asked; "you always seemed so comfortable here."

"It would not last any way. He'll have that Lucy Lawson before long. He can't stand out against her wiles much longer. We will go to London and open a shop or something. We always got on very well, me and you, Mrs. Jones."

"But you forget the captain!" exclaimed the astonished Sophy; "and I have not a penny of my own."

"The captain is not much at home, if all I hear is true, and you might be glad of an old friend in that wilderness of a place. There is that girl of yours, Eve, you know, it is quite time she was being set up in her profession. There has been no end of fuss about her voice, and she is not bad-looking, and surely she is your own, if nobody else wants to own her. She ought to be a fortune to any one that can manage her; and I will undertake that."

Still Sophy looked bewildered. "Eve was taken off my hands on certain conditions—you know all about that. Besides, I have just promised not to interfere with her," she said, with as much decision as she could assume.

"Leave her to me; I suppose if she helps you to a good livelihood no one will raise objections. You never had a head-piece."

"But I tell you there's the captain," persisted Sophy. "He is not a man to be trifled with." She was sure he, with his peculiar ideas of ways and means, would not like a sharp-eyed woman always about his house.

"I don't reckon the captain at all. If a man turns night into day and only comes

home to feed, he must be overlooked, if we can get along without him."

"Well, we shall soon see. I can only say that I have had enough of dependence when there was nothing to depend on."

Sophy saw that she must yield for the time, and thought the captain would soon settle the matter for her when he joined them in London.

Having made up her mind to leave Wyckam before she could be unpleasantly superseded, the energetic Mrs. Bray fancied this scheme might answer very well. Hitherto she had generally contrived to take the lead where her wishes were concerned, and, being anxious to leave in the full enjoyment of her self-esteem, she spent the remainder of the morning in visiting her acquaintances in Framborough.

CHAPTER X.

A FAILING SENSE.

THOUGH Mr. Forrest had treated this little matter of a woman's rights with a provoking calmness, it was not without its irritating consequences, and as he strode away from the offence that morning, his mind was not in harmony with the delightful spring day. He was generally quite ready to meet the glad, generous world with a soul as vigorous and free; but now he felt vexed and humiliated. Mrs. Bray would talk, and he should be laughed at. He was not at peace with himself about Mary Elton either. It looked very much as if he were frittering his life away, fluttering from flower to flower without even tasting the nectar of their secret and sweet souls. He was half afraid that he had rendered himself incapable of a

fervent, pure passion; and if this were so, to what end was his fine nature, his cultivation, his power of diffusing and captivating? He would fain have taken existence at its best, and added his portion of good to the Master's grand festival of life and love; and really he was not much better than a debased, bruised idol.

The farmer's men were at the brook washing the sheep, and Forrest, having a strong objection to the use of any needless violence in the trying circumstances to which the creatures are often submitted by their interfering masters, went down to help. There are plenty of things, he knew, to be done which are neither agreeable nor improving, and sheep-washing was as unpleasant as any thing could be, the poor, struggling, frightened creatures made such an exaggerated misery of their circumstances. One heavy-fleeced animal was quite beside herself with terror, and in her ignorance and despair broke away from the half-drenched washerman, and, with staring, beseeching eyes and piteous bleat, went swiftly down the stream. She was in danger of being drowned in her wet, clinging

wool, and the men did not appear ready to moisten their own legs in her behalf. So the master was soon knee-deep in water and tugging with all his might at the desperate sheep, which seemed to take his interference with its fate very hardly. Forrest was getting some stiff knocks and plenty of water, when another pair of hands came to his assistance, though, with the sun in his eyes and amidst all the splashing and struggling, he could see no one's face; but when all three were safe and on the bank he recognized Mr. Cameron. With his usual quick courtesy, Forrest held out his hand for a friendly clasp, but, seeing in an instant how soiled it was, he exclaimed, "It is cold and damp enough, Cameron. Never mind; we know it is a false interpreter this time. Thank you for coming to my sheep-washing and for assisting me in my strait." He remembered how they had parted the day before, and felt grateful for his friend's ready forgiveness.

"I did not come to your sheep-washing, for I knew nothing about it; and I should not have handed you out of the brook if I could have helped it," Cameron replied, with

a face as much out of order as his words were.

Uncertain of his meaning, Forrest asked him to walk up to the house and get some dry clothes and some luncheon; when, to his amazement, Cameron drew a willow switch three times sharply across his shoulders, setting his teeth together as if he meant to be savage, and adding, "Take that, you scoundrel!"

It is to be feared this strange outrage was premeditated, for the switch had been cut from a willow-tree growing by the brook-side and had been carefully trimmed, as if for a gentleman's shoulders. Still he recovered himself instantly when he had done his work, as if the sudden explosion had cleared his mind of some bad thoughts, and he said, with genuine penitence, "I am sorry, Forrest, I lashed you before your men. I didn't mean any one to be by. I meant to give you a hiding, but not before your servants. You should not have asked me to lunch with you as if all was fair between us."

For a moment Forrest was too much astonished to utter a word. He gazed at his assailant in indignant wonder; then, saying,

"I will wait for an explanation, George Cameron," he turned haughtily on his way to the house.

Smartly and successfully as the angry reformer of social abuses had exercised his little weapon, he was not satisfied with himself as his feelings cooled before the quiet scorn of his victim. He had given way to an insensate, animal sort of fury, caught an old friend at a disadvantage, and struck him before his servants; and this fact, with all his acknowledged Republicanism, jarred against his innate and finer sentiments. He was ashamed of himself, not at having taken a retributive measure into his own hands, but at having conducted it so badly, as creatures of a finite knowledge are apt enough to do if they step too boldly. "I meant to make him feel he was a cowardly scoundrel in spite of his fine-gentlemanly ways," he muttered, as he returned slowly by the Wyckam brook, lashing his hand with the little switch; "but I need not have made a sneak of myself."

When he had walked away some of his irritation he recollected that his old mother, ailing and alone, would be waiting dinner for him, and that possibly there might be some

demand upon his better judgment still. A spoiled dinner was a trial to both mother and son, quite as much on account of the absurd abuse of what ought to be a good thing as from Epicurean reasons. She scolded him, of course, but to her surprise he ate the dried mutton and sad potatoes without a complaint. After dinner he sat moodily silent, and then called himself a fool with as little reservation as if he had been any one else.

"Give over clanking plates and pans, mother, I have something to say to you," he said, after another thoughtful silence.

Mrs. Cameron put on her glasses to look well at him, and then listened to his account of this outrage at the sheep-washing.

"You don't mean to say that you have flogged Fred Forrest!" she exclaimed, as if he had been a naughty child.

"Ay, and it served him right."

"But, George, he is Mary Elton's old lover, and girls always take the side of the injured."

"I was the injured one then, if that is any comfort to you, though I don't understand why girls have any thing to do with the matter, Miss Elton especially."

Of course he did understand all his mother meant, but he chose to add, "You know I don't like women, and don't want them."

"I expect you are like the rest of mankind; you don't want to marry more than one at once, and as long as that one fills all the sunshine the rest are in the shade."

He turned away, to avoid the penetrating glance of her sensible eyes, as he asked, with sudden change of tone, "How old was my father when he first became deaf?"

"Between thirty and forty; but why do you ask about that now?"

"Never mind why—I have been thinking about it. His father was deaf too, I suppose. What were the symptoms, mother?"

"Your father used to complain of a confusing, droning sound in his head and a difficulty in keeping up with the conversation, if it were not especially addressed to him. But you are not growing deaf, and should not take fancies into your head. It would be ridiculous at your age," said the anxious mother, who would fain convince herself.

"I am not very far off forty, and I am grow-

ing deaf." He spoke with painful determination. Ever since his journey he had been sure he was becoming more dull, and was aware that people regarded him as deaf. It was far worse to have to keep up a false sensitiveness, to trouble every one, and himself especially, than to admit the worst and abide by it as well as he could.

"Why, George, you are getting as fanciful as your old mother! Your ears were always in the way, till lately," she said, with unwonted gentleness.

"They were too keen to last, mother. However, I suppose I can bear what others have borne. I shall not be the first deaf musician."

"You are fanciful," the old lady said, driven to invent something, she was so sadly concerned; "I never thought you were nervous."

"I have had such a confounded noise in my head ever since I went abroad; and it is worse now than ever. Your voice sounds dull and muffled, as if it were in another room."

"That is because I am weakly; I have a cold, you know. You must not think of

growing deaf, you with your dependence on your music, George. It would be more than you could bear."

He was certainly a man of strong will, and resolute enough to carry most of his points; but his mother spoke as if he were capable of defying the evils flesh inherits, if he would. He shook his head in rather a desponding way, though repeating his assertion that he could bear a privation as well as any other man, as he went to realize the evil in his own forlorn apartment. A deaf musician! Cameron knew how much was involved when he said, defiantly, he should not be the first deaf musician.

Devoted to his wonderful and glorious talent, the one gift and grace of his lonely life, the only circumstance, as he thought, that made existence good to him, he had gone on cultivating this gift and indulging in this grace till every other resource had been sacrificed; and now he found that safe and happy haven closed against his poor life-bark, and he must be tossed wildly and hopelessly, seeking beauty and rest, and finding only weariness and discord.

With a quick bitterness and almost hatred of himself, he contemplated this dying from all that he cared to know and be. The power of endurance, boasted of just now, wanted something to support it, something that other deaf musicians had—wealth or fame, or family or friend, or even the palliative of an enduring temper, while he possessed none of these. Even the little bright-winged hope that had managed through much tribulation to settle itself in his secret soul, must be crushed down; for what maiden would be so infatuated as to smile on the discourteous and unfortunate Cameron, who to the fateful list of disadvantages must add this crowning incongruity of deafness? It was such a strangely inappropriate thing to happen to him, he was so sensitive to any absurd peculiarity, he fancied—not being aware, of course, how strongly-marked his characteristics were—and people usually connected some half-ludicrous, half-pitiable idea with this privation, smiling with superior self-complacency or frowning impatiently when failing to make themselves understood, grandly tolerant of hopeless stupidity or peevishly

giving up any attempt at intercourse as too troublesome. All these considerations, enhanced by the continued personal inconvenience he must endure, weighed very heavily upon him; the pertinacity with which evil fortune had kept close by, having made it hard enough for him to bear the rubs and taunts of the world and his own sensitive reflections. There could have been no mercy in visiting him with this peremptory incapacity, to make him more isolated and reserved and self-dependent.

The bereavement had not come without warning, but for a long time he had resolutely defied it. His friends had raised the tone of their voices a trifle when addressing him, and he kept as much to his loneliness as possible. The bewildering, besetting noise was the worst now; it was increasing, and always came when he was excited or tired, or trying to think profoundly. Latterly he had sometimes felt as though his self-command were going to the winds; as if he must suffer himself to drift any where, for he had not dared to touch the violono, lest it should betray him. Yet he had tried very hard to

make the best of life, knowing that his temper was not easy to manage, that he must fight a stiff, stern battle with himself and surrender only when the leadership was certain and right. Each day he was getting more irritable and disturbed, more afraid of the violono; and for the twentieth time he reached down a volume in which he fancied his peculiar case was discussed, and read and re-read, hoping, even against the sternest probabilities, that he might have deceived himself. He held his watch in his hand and tested the dulled nerves with painful anxiety, and then, in a paroxysm of misery and excitement, for all this tension had increased the evil, he struck the poor offending ears with his vexed hand and exclaimed, aloud, "This eternal droning in my head will drive me stark mad! Why am I called upon to bear all this?"

It was only for the moment, just when all was realized and his soul was so grievously sore, that he could not bear this great calamity. He was ashamed directly of his weak surrender, and it was well that he did not know, how his mother, in her yearning pity,

had followed him to his retreat and had seen and heard all. Her suffering was not less intense, perhaps even more crushing, for she dare not show her sympathy. She could offer no comfort to this man whose strength added so much bitterness to his trials. Seeing that this was no time for her help, she stole silently away, her stately head bent lower than it had ever been for many a year, and her heart sinking with the weight of sorrow that comes with the purest love. It was a pity Mrs. Cameron did not stay awhile longer, for, strange as the fact seems, the intensest mental suffering can soonest help itself to some consolation, perhaps even its strong excitement suggesting to some minds, capacities for victory, and to others giving power enough to endure patiently.

George Cameron was not one of the patient ones, so long as a test remained untried. He would know the worst and then meet his fate, armed as a soldier rather than a saint. After a few minutes given to the agony of an assured loss, he unfolded the new bow Mary Elton had bought in London and sent to him with her love. He had received it as a token

of her kind consideration, otherwise of no value to him, and had not even looked at it. He examined it absently, thinking chiefly of her, and how her eyes would be heavy with wondering pity the next time they met his and she knew what had happened to him. After a while he took the violono out of its case and put it tenderly in its old place between his knees. Then he paused; with what dread lest the sweet and delicate harmonies should be lost to him for ever, any musician can imagine. For two months he had not dared to evoke a sound from this precious companion; he would tarry no longer, now that he had gone through what must surely be the worst. He was nervous and trembled, feeling as if he were about to stake all that was worth living for.

The marriage between the new bow and the instrument that had gone through so much had to be accomplished, and it was a crucial affair. Presently some good music came, certainly not so full and rich as of yore; and at each pause the seething noise in his ears was very distressing. Twice he started up and flung his bow aside, feeling ready to

wreak a surer destruction on the violone than the rioters had effected; but at each renewed attempt there was more to be satisfied with. Then he opened the book of the "Messiah" and went on from one glory to another, gaining confidence and joy, till enthusiasm was quick within his soul, and he became as rapt and triumphant as he had ever been. He came to the end, conqueror over the dreaded fate, having lost nothing.

The great master's grandeur was as unique, his pathos as exquisite, his genius as accordant as ever, to the faithful translater. What the tried, thankful man did then, in his great, glorified surprise, need not be told. Assured that his sense for music was exquisite still, he played hour after hour—to interpret, his apprehension was not dead, or even dulled. It was nothing miraculous, the cause was evident enough. His soul had been penetrated by the music of the masters till he had become independent of his outward ears. He was a type, in a single direction, of what we must eventually all become, in every capacity, before the purpose of being is fulfilled here.

When his mother, unable to rest for care

about him, crept back to his door and looked in, she marvelled to see a quiet smile on his face and the old sympathetic motion flitting about his brow and lips. She smiled too, as if she had divined a new and pleasant truth, thinking indeed, that even genius could make right its ways.

Quite unconscious of her presence, Cameron said, as he replaced the faithful instrument, "I might have *trusted*, if I had not *known*. What matters a sense, more or less, when one's soul is true?"

After that night Cameron was, at any rate, better prepared to meet the isolated lot he had to bear; and after that watch he never heard a word from the true-hearted and penitent mother in disparagement of the violono or his musical and miscellaneous extravagances.

Before George Cameron left his apartment there was a rap at the door, and Bernard Fielding entered.

"It is all right, boy," the elated musician explained, the late excitement still quivering about him. "Look here, this bow is a magician's wand—of course, every artist's

implement is—it exorcises every sense of wrong. You know how deaf I am, Bernard?"

This privation had never been alluded to before; Bernard would never have said a word about it, and he was so surprised to hear it thus declared, and even treated as something especially right, he could only wait to hear the issue.

"I tell you it is all right. I have been a coward; but I am master of the circumstances now. You cannot imagine what I have gone through since I went abroad. I got so much worse, caught cold in their damp, unused places. Well, I had not dared to touch the violono; I never unwrapped Mary's bow till to-night. Something possessed me to try it to-night; and it is glorious! I thought, you know, that the instrument would be treacherous—that it might shriek or groan, give untrue, harrowing versions of the reverend and pure. It is not so. The violono is not of our human nature at all. Not a note is falsified; every passage tells as much and as grandly as ever. What do you say now to this music of ours? Is it not all-sufficing,

Bernard? What do we want with wives and friends, or material aids?"

Bernard was very glad: his eyes beamed; but he dared not say much, lest too great realization should dispel this enthusiasm and drive the sufferer into doubt and silence again. "It is a blessing, Cameron," he said, quietly; "and God is very good!"

CHAPTER XI.

SOME LESSONS FOR EVE.

THE morning paper containing a report of the concert in which Eve had made her first appearance before the London audience, was lying on the table in the Serles' little room. The realization of her great success, all plainly written out for a nation's reading, had kept the family longer than usual over their breakfast-table. Mr. Serle had apparently been right in keeping Eve in the shade, until the provincialisms and other signs of a neglected education, had been overcome, and her genius as well as her beauty had matured. He had not been without some slight misgiving, which, indeed, her wayward nature warranted, lest a sudden fancy should dispel his hardly-instilled refinements, and send composer and master

all dismembered to the winds, leaving a most unconventional maiden to the tender mercies of the cruel, and bringing down derision and failure on his own head. He was satisfied that this had not been the case. From the first moment Eve had been well received. She bore her gorgeous style of dress well. San Serle had gratified his love of rich costume in arraying her with as much splendour as was consistent with good taste; and she was dignified enough to bear her honours bravely. Youthful, without a tinge of awkwardness, self-dependent and composed without one critical impulse, original and taxing without one lawless outbreak in her fresh and vigorous rendering, she had brought down a sufficient and prophetic applause from gods and men. Women are too conservative, to take to their bosoms a young unknown, without some little consideration. Some of these feminine authorities said she was too transparent and self-asserting. The singer ought to interpret the poet's words by the musician's soul, and not to suffer the medium to appear in the least. Here was a young thing presuming to be Eva Serlina,

or whoever she was, in undisguised enjoyment of the love or woe or reverence of her song, whether Rossini or Mendelssohn or any other immortal man bade her be him or die.

Something of this temper had got into the critique Eve was reading upon herself, and she pouted as she read, "When the fair Eva has lived a few of the passages of life that are at present mere sentiments, she will be more apt at that seemly self-reservation, which is the true interpreter's fit homage to the master's genius."

"And does this great open-eyed monster of a public—which, after all, is only some puffy critic really—mean that I, the singer, must vanish into thin air whenever I rise up, and, having no individuality, be a mere mechanical instrument of even less than an instrument's virtue?" Eve exclaimed, throwing the paper back to her guardian indignantly. "Am I not at least a third when I sing?"

"Not even a third—only a tone," said Serle, laughing at Eve's involuntary witticism.

Eve could not explain that she had felt herself to be a seraph almost, whose lips

the master had touched, whose soul had quickened under his inspiration, but with a response irrepressibly her own, quivering with life and feeling before that which would, by itself, have been only beautiful or grand.

"Be satisfied!" Serle exclaimed, playing lazily with the egg he thought ought to be incorporated with his own invaluable individualism. "Are you not a woman, and therefore in the full enjoyment of every thing that is worth having and which we men desire? You may surely afford to lose occasionally, and for a few minutes, this self when it is to be restored to you with so much homage and intensified life. I would give ten years of my very advanced existence to be you for this one day, surging with triumph over the achieved and effervescing with impatience after the possible,—resistless and vivid as a glass of sparkling champagne. Only look at me—type of successful manhood, suffering morning to lapse into noon before I can undertake to look myself in the face, and succumbing before Dinorah's dainty muffins! How to get through the hours till night brings me to my kind, is the second

problem I have to read to myself every morning, as soon as I have solved the first. I am weary of halls and galleries and things of beauty, that is, weary of seeking for beauty. Now were I a woman I should appropriate all within myself; and the longing, so insatiate, yet so fruitless, would be at an end."

Mr. Serle looked quite extinguished after this long speech, but it only provoked Eve's light smile. "How little you understand us!" she said. "Of course it is nice to be pretty, we know all about that, and we could not bear to be neglected and plain; but that does not make us a bit more satisfied; indeed I do not think there is such a thing as satisfaction in the world," she added, with a thoughtful sigh, that might have come from the proved wisdom of threescore years.

"You unreasonable little soul! Why, Eva, you combine in your lovely personality the divine triad—you *have*, and *do*, and *be*. What more would you?" Serle's words only were enthusiastic; one eyebrow was slightly elevated and the manner was supremely *ennuyée*.

"I would only *be*," Eve said, pensively. "I used to long so to sing in public, to be applauded and encored by a great multitude, all moved to smiles and tears and applause by me; but even before that time came, I had found that I might do all this without being any great matter. I have stood before Punch and Judy with a crowd, and seen as much emotion excited. Then I longed to sing well enough to please clever men, like you and Bernard and my old master. I tried very hard to succeed, and I did, you know; but my success only seemed to drive me away from Framborough and the few people I cared for, or that cared for me. Then came that intense desire to sing in London, in one of the grand theatres, with great musicians and great people of all sorts listening round about, with eager, admiring eyes fixed on me. I thought if I could pick up a flower thrown by some noble person to my feet I should never feel restless or disheartened or sad any more. Last night I crushed roses with every step, and a crown of roses came from the royal box. Your sister said it was a great triumph; she brought

home the wreath, and treasures it. I do not care for it. The poor singing-lark does not get within heaven's gate. It has to come fluttering down to earth again."

"Strange old-fashioned thoughts to come into a young maiden's head! Who put them there, I wonder? The child has no time to read metaphysics; has she got hold of Plato?" Serle said, reflectively.

"I have heard you call me a genius—does not that account for my strange thoughts?"

"Not necessarily; genius is usually one-sided, or only of use on one side, grotesque on the other, is it not so?" A grain of interest was infused in the question; for Mr. Serle felt that his own claims to be entitled a genius were somewhat weakened by his little affectations, interesting as he had once thought them.

"Indeed I do not think so, or genius would not please sensible people, like Mr. Cameron."

Serle sprang to his feet with an amazing amount of energy, condemning Mr. Cameron in a most profane manner, to the depths. He toned down again surprisingly soon; he

rarely forgot himself so far as to waste his substance in riot and excess. Falling on one knee before Eve, he said, plaintively, "If your ambition drove you away from Framborough, it brought you to the metropolis; if you left behind those whom you loved, you came to those who love you; which is better?"

"I would rather love, ten thousand times!" she exclaimed, with some impetuosity.

"Gently, my sweet singer; do not waste your wondrous powers. Is it not possible to combine the two conditions?"

"No."

"Does the active verb, then, of necessity crush out the passive one? 'I love, I am loved'—is it not so in life? Why, it is one of the few lessons left to me of my youth."

"Life is always at cross purposes. But where is Miss Serle? She promised to breakfast with us this morning." Eve rose, as she spoke, to go to her friend.

"Dinorah never breakfasts after a public evening; she suffers herself to be too much moved. Evalina, my darling, do not desert me!"

Eve turned in surprise; not at the words—

Serle's form of address was frequently rather florid—it was the tone that struck her as unusual. He stood pulling his long beard with both hands and looking wistfully, even entreatingly, towards her, and with so much more than his wonted vigour, that she hurriedly opened the door, half frightened, and half disposed to laugh. She met one of the maid-servants close by, who said a lady was in the drawing-room waiting to speak to her.

Mrs. Bray, much more handsomely dressed, but not a whit more harmonious than she was as the housekeeper at Wyckam, rose from Dinorah's own easy-chair. "So you are here, are you?" was her form of greeting the young singer. "Well, some people are like cats, and are sure to light on their legs, but I did not expect it of you, Eve Fletcher."

"You are, of course, agreeably disappointed then?" Eve retorted, all her natural pertness flushing at this unexpected meeting. Like most exceptional people, she was so susceptible of influences, so easily transmuted by the characters of those she was with, as to be a surprise to many, sometimes even to herself.

Mrs. Bray conceded that her disappointment was agreeable enough, as Eve's good fortune would, in this instance, answer her own purpose. "I am come from your mother, child, with authority from her, and all it may concern, to take you home to her; and as there is no time to be lost, you may as well say good-bye to these people at once, and come your ways with me." She spoke with the air of a well-accredited envoy, and looked as if might and right were both on her side.

Eve was startled, feeling for the moment a strange sense of being in subjection to the will of another; but, soon recovering herself, she said, calmly, "If mamma wants me she can come for me; I shall not leave this place with you."

"You are young, Eve Fletcher, to talk as if you was your own mistress; but you was never counted an idiot yet, nor slow to see what was for your own good. You know your ma made a promise to them as had a right over her, that she would not go to see you herself, or in any way interfere, while you needed bringing up, or she might have the trouble and expense all on her hands.

I may suppose you are brought up by this time, if looks go for any thing, and you are ready to make your own fortune. Your ma has a place of her own now to take you in; and I undertook, as a friend, to save her from breaking her word, and from the excitement, which she has not strength to bear. Now she will be fretting herself ill if we keep her longer in suspense; so run and pack up all your fine things, and don't keep the cab waiting, there's a dear."

Eve considered: liberty would be very sweet, and she had no doubts of her powers and ready success; she was old enough to be her own mistress, and talented enough to make her own fortune good. Her mind readily responded to Mrs. Bray's propositions, but her soul revolted against this messenger.

"Where is mamma living?" she asked.

Mrs. Bray handed over a card with the name engraved thereon which had been borne by Sophy Fletcher in her palmy days. The address was also of the old locality. Sophy was to live again in the personality of her fair young daughter, with the prestige of the old past about her. This was satisfactory,

but Mrs. Bray's presence in the arrangement was a great stumblingblock. There was her stepfather too; he might be calculating upon her gains. Eve shook her shrewd little head as these ideas flitted through it, and then said, with decision, "I shall stay where I am for the present, tell mamma."

In vain did Mrs. Bray coax and scold and represent the advantages her freedom would realize, the penalties she was paying for suffering a stranger to control her. Eve was firm; at least she would not go with Mrs. Bray. She knew when she was well off now, she said; and was as much mistress there as any one was, as Mrs. Bray should find, if she thought well.

Eve had just made this remark and was standing by the opened door, with heightened colour and tone, when San Serle, having heard much of the argument, walked in.

"Of course Evalina is mistress here when she chooses to be," he said, supremely. "You are not the young lady's mother, I think, so we need not be constrained by any considerations of an unpleasantly filial kind if we request you to take leave of us at once."

He bowed towards the door as he spoke with an air of such gracious decision, looking so like a grandee in adversity, Mrs. Bray afterwards explained to her friend, that she felt the propriety of curtsying herself out of the august presence. She was not daunted, however; but turned, when half way down the stairs, to remind Eve Fletcher that she belonged to her mother, and no one else had any legal right to her; so she had better make up her mind pretty soon to take herself off to that address.

When she was gone Mr. Serle looked serious. "What is that vulgar person's relation to you, Eva?" he asked, with signs of strong disfavour.

"Nothing whatever; she is a friend of mamma's from Wyckam Hall."

"Oh, indeed! then your mamma has some connexions. But this woman, is she then related to Mr. Forrest of Wyckam?"

"No," Eve said, wishing Mr. Serle would not be so unusually and inconveniently persevering.

"A guest, then, my dear?"

Eve stifled her pride with a certain

haughtiness characteristic of her independent spirit, and said, quickly, "She is Mr. Forrest's housekeeper, that is all."

Serle was very persevering that morning, and would not let that be all. "I heard her call you Eve Fletcher; is that your real name?"

"I don't know. She always calls me so, but no one else does, and I do not like it." Eve shrugged her shoulders impatiently as she spoke.

"Is Fletcher your mother's name?"

"Yes—no, not now, she has married again." Eve was sensitive about names, and refrained from that her mother bore.

Serle was not interested in that matter, so did not press upon it; but he was singularly persistent about Eve. "Her name *was* Fletcher, I suppose, when you were born; at least that was your father's name; and he was uncle, or something of that kind, to the young fellow who helped you to defend Mr. Cameron's property?" he asked, thinking he had at last discovered the connexion between the two young people.

Eve had not been without much natural curiosity concerning her unknown parent;

but any questions she had asked had been so ungraciously received and set aside, that an uncomfortable consciousness, bordering on shame, took possession of this side of her nature. Little as she liked this idea of Mr. Serle's, and assured as she felt that her father was not of the same class as the Fletchers were, she felt incapable of explanation, and only said, "I never knew my father."

"Nor I mine. Indeed I know nothing of the parental relation in any form, so it is probable that I exaggerate the claims and am morbidly sensitive as to the responsibilities on both sides. For instance, should your mother come in her own proper person and claim you, I fear we must give you into her clutches, claws and fangs notwithstanding."

Eve smiled. She knew how harmless and flimsy her mother's character really was, how autocratically she might rule her, if Captain Jones did not interfere. She confided her wishes and her fears, and as she concluded Dinorah entered.

San put on his most tragic air, as he said,

"It is as you foretold, Dinny, the little singing-lark is wearying of its gilded cage and longing for the lawlessness of nature, with its hail, rain, and storms, anything that will try its delicate throat and ruffle its pretty plumage. The young thing cannot endure ease and assured plenty; it wants anxiety, suspense, harrowing alternations, stern necessities to give purpose to effort and zest to success. Ay, it is the bane of youth to disaffect everything that is not for some ulterior good, some far-off end."

"Say the blessing rather, San," said the more vigorous Dinorah. "Just imagine a young thing as limp and purposeless as you are—it would be an enormity! Why, even you were active and striving once. When you were learning the harp you practised for Chatterton eight hours a day."

"I have outlived all recollection of such a state. I could play Beethoven before I could speak plain."

Eve laughingly broke in upon his sentence. "That is not saying much for your precocity —you lisp now, Mr. Serle."

San shook his head languidly as he said,

"At any rate, I never sang for my supper, Eve Fletcher."

Eve pouted, prettily, he thought. "Perhaps not; but you have sung for fame, and I do not see much difference. I suppose you felt a necessity of some sort."

"The child is beginning to think, Dinny. Surely we might do worse than give it a settled home and a name it would not be ashamed to bear! What do you say?"

"Only that I trust to your indolence to preserve you from any irretrievable absurdity," said Miss Serle, with as much severity as she could assume.

"But in this case there would be no need for effort. All is already consummated; the mystic knot simply needs the touch of priestly hands, or the breath of the civic power, to tighten what is already in form."

If that previous little scene in the breakfast-room had not occurred, Eve would not have comprehended a word of Serle's meaning; even now she was guided more by the look he directed towards her than by his words; and, helpless and dependent as she

had been, she felt the allusion as an impertinence not to be tolerated.

"If you think that of me, I shall go to mamma this very day," she said; and, passing him as if she had been some outraged princess, she hastened to her room to think and to decide.

CHAPTER XII.

BETWEEN THE SPINNIES.

THOUGH the mischief in the Elton family was increasing, Mr. Cameron's hands were tied in the matter he had thought of much consequence, the arrest of Will Fletcher, owing to the illness of Kitty. No personal consideration would have influenced him to impede retributive justice for an hour, but he recoiled from bringing trouble on a home already in the shadow of death.

A strangely exciting circumstance, however, or rather the issue of a sinister train of circumstances, took place, threatening to be his vicegerent, and raising Framborough once more to a conspicuous height amongst the boroughs of mid-England. Those night-encounters, that seemed in their narration so like the legends, newly read, of old, bad

times, had been repeated about the lonely roads and lanes. Now and then a farmer or dealer reached his homestead lightened of his purse, and apparently well-nigh of his wits, he could only give such a meagre account of his misfortune; and many a wife sat by her sleepy fire in fear and trembling as she listened for the good man's horse, now praying tenderly, and anon inwardly scolding at him, for delaying his return. One good effect the dark and gentlemanly rider of the wonderful black horse had produced—the farmers did not venture to bait their docile animals at the wayside inns; and perhaps the freebooter's conscience was eased thereby, he having the pelf instead of the beings who, by virtue of a licence, consider the destruction of weak man their legitimate business.

Mr. Forrest had taken the precaution of engaging a room at the half-way house, a commodious and respectable hotel, though of primitive style, standing near the convergence of several by-lanes with the high-road to the county town. If business detained him after dusk he put up there for the night. He had done this frequently while the harvest was

being gathered in at the Fen Farm; and he had no objection to the occasional companionship of the lively and pleasant Captain Jones, who had most courteously condoned that indignity of being turned out of house and home at an hour's notice, but who must needs have a local habitation occasionally, when his business—a cattle agent, he called himself now—brought him into the neighbourhood.

One night—it was that of the cheese fair—Mr. Forrest turned in much later than usual, and therefore unexpectedly. The host met him with many apologies, the late hour, the great influx of visitors had misled him, and he had suffered his usual bed-room to be appropriated. There was another chamber in which were two beds, one of which was at liberty, the other Captain Jones had engaged, and the perturbed landlord ventured to think that perhaps Mr. Forrest would not find Captain Jones an insuperable obstacle to a good night's rest.

Mr. Forrest had found the captain pleasant enough as a chance companion, amenable and even facile in more intricate relations than this one could possibly be; so he assented with his usual urbanity; and, learning that the

military agent was already at rest, he too retired; and with an easy and affable valediction as he passed his bed, betook himself to his own. The captain's profession considered and the peculiar state of the neighbourhood, he was not surprised to see a brace of pistols lying on the dressing-table; but he thought of them as means to an end that might be unhappy, if any interloper's hand fell on them, and jocosely advised that Jones should put one of the dangerous things under his pillow, while he took in the other. The owner gave a drowsy assent, but did not rise; so Forrest laid one of the weapons by his side and appropriated the other. He did not know how long he had slept, when he was roused by a slight sound, like the click of a lock, and, his latest thought being of the pistols, his wakened mind reverted instantly to them, and he started up, exclaiming, "Who is there?" He felt at the same instant for the one he thought was so near at hand; but the quick response of the captain, that he fancied the door had not been securely fastened and that he had just risen to assure himself, was sufficiently satisfactory.

Mr. Forrest confessed afterwards to a

momentary idea that Jones must have been dressed, for his form was not distinguishable in the gloom, as it must have been had he been invested with his night raiment; but, though he always woke with his faculties fully armed and ready for use, he was a conscientious sleeper when repose was the duty of the hour, and he disposed himself without further parley to finish his night's rest. He was right in saying that he could wake within five minutes of his appointed time, but he must make his pact with slumber until then; so he slept soundly, awaking as the morning broke and rising instantly, with the intention of breakfasting at Wyckam. The room was vacant of the captain and his appliances—even the pistol which had been laid at the bed's head was gone.

As Mr. Forrest dressed he heard an unusual noise and bustle in this generally decorous house; and the landlord met him at his room door with a grave and troubled face.

"There has been another highway robbery between the Spinnies," he said. "It is Cotswold, the cheese-factor, that has been robbed,

and he is in the house now, with a constable and ever so many officials. He was a little elevated, he says, but nothing to speak of; but I think he is wrong there, or he would not have come here to turn my place upside-down; and we are full of strangers, too."

As the landlord spoke the constable came up and proceeded to search Mr. Forrest's room in a minute, methodical way, as if he might be exploring for a mouse. They were all well acquainted with each other, and of course Mr. Forrest understood the emergencies of the case and volunteered the information that Captain Jones, his old tenant, had occupied the other bed.

"Where is Captain Jones now?" the chief officer asked, with a look that seemed to challenge heaven and earth to keep back any thing from his knowledge.

"I don't know: he was gone before I awoke," said Forrest; and then he gave the particulars of his night's rest.

"Captain Jones comes and goes at all hours on business," Beddowes explained, turning to Mr. Forrest, as to a safe and comfortable

authority who would sustain the reputation of his house.

"Yes, he comes and goes, we know as well as Mr. Beddowes does; but it might be an extra convenience to know where he is gone to just now. Who saw Captain Jones leave your house this morning, Beddowes?" the portly officer asked, placing his broad and undeniable person before the door as if he were about to arrest every individual there.

"Well, I have made inquiries, and no one seems to know any thing about it. I keep no regular watch—an orderly house like this needs none; and I suppose the captain could let himself out if he wished."

The good host, zealous enough in the cause of justice, naturally resented any inquiries into his private arrangements; and he regarded his regular guests as personal friends, heeding their comfort and convenience in a disinterested way, obsolete and impossible in in these rapid, preoccupied days.

He was mollified by the explanation of the official, who said that, as this robbery took place rather late—some time between three and four—and Captain Jones appeared to

have risen early, he might have seen or heard something of this clever gentleman, who must be a sort of Flying Dutchman, he thought.

Mr. Cotswold had joined the group, which was increased by most of the household and guests by this time. He lived at a distant town and had no knowledge of Captain Jones, and, hearing him thus inquired after, he leaped to the conclusion that the robber and the captain were one and the same. Accosting Mr. Forrest, he asked, "What sort of a man is this Jones? Is he a big, powerful man, strong, you know, and nimble as a thimble-rigger? Because I should never have given in to an ordinary fellow. He flashed his pistol in my face, and before I recovered from the amaze he had one hand on my throat and the other at my pocket."

"Oh, he is a quiet, decent man—rather gentlemanly than otherwise. His business takes him abroad frequently; and that, with his military training, gives him an easy, off-hand manner. I have known Jones for years, and never heard or saw any thing wrong about him."

"But I want to know what he is like, for I am pretty sure I should know him again, for we came to close quarters. My man has a lot of black hair: I managed to knock his cap off, and I had the presence of mind to keep it too. He has great bright eyes that glare in the dark," said the factor, whose encounter appeared to have affected his imagination. He pulled a black velvet cap out of his pocket, and it was handed round and commented on. No one had seen Captain Jones wear such a cap; but that was no reason why he might not have worn it.

"He is not your man at all, sir," Forrest said, with decision. "Why, Jones slept in that bed last night in this very room with me; and, I tell you, I have known him for years!" Forrest seemed to think it was impossible that a freebooter could sleep like another man.

"Excuse me, but that is no argument at all," the cheese-factor replied, with as much decision. "We talk, and eat, and sleep with people without knowing much about them. If you have done business with him, that may be a different matter: the character of an

individual is pretty sure to show itself in his business relations. But it is a mistake common to humanity to suppose that your familiar acquaintances are not exceptional for good or evil."

"I *have* done business with Captain Jones, sir, and have no reason to suspect him of highway robbery. This is ridiculous!" Mr. Forrest said, vexed by the absurd pertinacity of this little smooth-faced, soft-voiced man, whose manner was so simple and straightforward, while his mind seemed unusually penetrative and alert.

Beddowes agreed with Mr. Forrest that no highwayman could possibly have stood in Captain Jones's shoes; and between them they might have suppressed the factor, but all the officers of justice supported him. They had some occult knowledge or shrewd suspicions about this man Jones, and plied Cotswold with questions and suggestions until they felt pretty sure that this freebooter was the one whom they had sought on three former occasions, and whom they had, with almost superhuman boldness, connected with this said captain.

"I suppose you have no objection to our searching the house and premises on the Fen farm, sir?" the constable asked of Mr. Forrest, in a tone that disclaimed objection.

"Oh, no, search and welcome; I will go with you now," said Forrest, lightly; and the party started instantly.

As they were passing Beddowes' hay-loft one of the ostlers touched his master's shoulder, and, pointing to a ladder that lay close by, whispered, "That there ladder warn't there last night, master; and no one's put it there since."

Incredulous, or not disposed to court any further scandal on his own premises, Beddowes took no notice of the warning, but followed the rest to the farm-house. It was still untenanted, being too lonely and large to suit the farm-bailiff and his childless wife, who preferred their snug little cottage in the adjoining hamlet. So Mr. Forrest unlocked the door himself and led the way into the silent and dreary rooms. There was not any sign of recent occupation, but that peculiar burdensome quiet that always breathes through a some-time empty house, as if the

spirits of the late inhabitants had left some quelling influence behind. The out-houses and rick-yard were then well looked over—of course, with no result, for, as the constable said, outlaws do not choose isolated places to lie by in—"They have something that stands for a conscience, sir, even the worst of them, that takes 'em within sight or sound of what's human. They are clever, most of 'em, and like to keep their wits a-going; but they can't stand lonesomeness."

As the official spoke he and Mr. Cotswold had separated themselves from the others, and were standing by a sort of brake overgrown with gorse and brambles. They had brought the dogs from the wayside inn and were watching them make their passage of lively and self-satisfied investigation. Mr. Beddowes' little terrier began to gyrate in a mysterious manner about a certain spot; but as there was evidently no cover for any thing bigger than a hare, its intimations seemed merely capricious, till it began to whine and bark impatiently.

A strange unearthly response issued from the spot, more like an insensate laugh than

any thing else. Mr. Cotswold, whose nerves had certainly been recently tried, grasped his companion's arm; but was quickly shaken off, and a battery of stamps and blows was directed against the ground and all it bore. The sound was repeated; it was a thin, highly-pitched note of laughter, but there was no mirth in it; it was cool and graceless, like some infernal challenge or bravado. The constable was beginning a sort of imprecatory sentence expressive of his wish to know what power was setting itself against him, but Cotswold stopped him and pointed to the dogs. The terrier was wheeling round more madly than ever, and even the mastiff was moved. At a signal the whole party came to the mysterious spot and heard the particulars of the ghostly voice, with much amazement. They sounded the ground with their sticks and gun-stocks; and certainly that particular part the terrier had chosen for her pranks, had a peculiar and hollow sound.

"It is said that Dick Turpin had an underground stable somewhere here," Mr. Forrest said; "but I have never seen any opening except what the rabbits have made."

"Was the noise any thing like a whinny?" Beddowes asked, looking as if a sudden light had dawned.

"Yes, it was very like a whinny, now you mention it; only such a way off, it seemed, and yet it sounded so plain."

"You don't believe in the ghost of Black Bess, surely?" a derisive voice exclaimed, close to Cotswold's elbow.

"Oh, Mr. Cameron, you are come at a very opportune moment; you know more about these old stories and places than any of us," Mr. Forrest said, as he greeted this person, who, being on his way to the county town, and having heard at the half-way house of the robbery and the search, had proceeded to the Fen Farm.

All the particulars being repeated to Mr. Cameron, several attempts were made to raise that weird sound from the depths again; but in vain: the presence of numbers seemed to have laid the ghost. Still the testimony of those who had heard was reliable; and Mr. Cameron reflected. He recommended that they should try the ground carefully with their guns, listening as they did so for that hollow sound they spoke of. He soon saw

that the faces of the beaters were set towards the farm-house.

"I thought so," he said. "There is a subterranean passage from the house. It is very likely closed up now, but perhaps we can make an entrance to something more." He led the way straight on through the front room to the scullery. This opened into a sort of coal-hole. The first investigators had paused here; Mr. Cameron went in and began to clear away a pile of fuel. It was now suspected that the coals had only been placed there as a screen, the searchers finding an opening behind them which looked like a black hole terminating in a speck of light. There was a general cry of surprise.

"Somebody must have been through since we were here half an hour ago," two or three exclaimed, in a tone of triumph.

They were hushed by the man of warrants. "Silence, gentlemen, if you please. That there was no door open here when we searched this place, I'll take my oath afore any bench. Now you had better let me go in first with the handcuffs, unless any gentleman prefers to take the lead."

"If any body has passed through this cellar lately, it would be to escape. He has taken advantage of us and our warning and decamped in time to save himself," Mr. Forrest said. Still all seemed disposed to proceed; so without more delay, and contriving to walk two abreast, they entered the dark passage.

Proceeding for some distance, they were too intent on their sole object to note the way the end was reached. There, a dull oil-lamp was burning, and close by stood a fine black horse. It was a beautiful creature, very powerful, but apparently as docile, for the bright, intelligent eyes it turned upon its visitors had a welcome light in them, and that good-natured neigh, that had been the note of betrayal, was repeated. This horse was the only inhabitant of the cave; but his shining coat and the usual accessories of a stable, showed that he had very recently passed under some skilled and careful hand.

The owner of the premises was even more surprised at this discovery than the others were; only Mr. Cotswold appearing to have had any previous acquaintance with the exis-

tence of this animal. He ventured to think that this must be the strong, well-trained creature that breasted him so sagaciously and with such sinister effect.

Though the black steed of this nether stable showed even more plainly than animals usually do some consciousness of things to us inscrutable, nothing of a satisfactory nature could be taken thence; so the party made their way to the upper world again. Acting upon the suggestion that a breakfast at the inn would be a great help to further investigation, they returned to the half-way house. Passing the hay-loft Mr. Beddowes was hailed by the suspecting ostler.

"Come here, master; if there isn't a man in that there loft, I don't stand here! Me and Bill made sure of it; and we never left off watching; but kept ourselves close and still. Now you had not been gone ten minutes afore a head was put out there where the hay goes in. We both seed it and will take our oath it wor a man's."

"Indeed! What did you say to it?" Mr. Forrest asked, as each individual drew up to the accused spot.

"We had no time to say nothing. It was gone in a wink."

"But why did you not go in too? It may have escaped."

"There's been no chance of escape; we've never took our eyes off sin'. And any one may go in for me; I've got a wife and family, I have," said the ostler significantly.

"So have I, for that matter," the chief officer remarked, in an undertone, as he was signalled towards the ladder, now raised against the only opening to the loft.

All hung back, probably wishing the ostler had not been so perspicacious, or that eccentric people would not choose such critical spots to play their sullen games at hide-and-seek in. There was some talk of the probability of a mistake; at any rate the place could be watched; and if there were a fellow there, why he could be starved out, and apprehended when all the advantages were not on one side.

"To be sure, to be sure," Beddowes repeated, two or three times in a comforting tone —"Now come in to breakfast, and we will keep a sharp look out on the loft, I warrant ye."

"What is the hindrance?" Mr. Cameron asked, not understanding all the little complicities of the situation. "You don't let out your hay-loft to suspicious customers, do you, Beddowes?"

"Well, no—but this may not be anybody, you see."

"It is very easy to find that out," said Cameron, advancing towards the ladder.

He was stopped by Frederick Forrest, who pushed him gently, but firmly aside, saying, "Not you, Cameron, you might be taken at a disadvantage, you know; I should hear the slightest stir before he could use his pistol; and if it be the captain, I shall stand a better chance. He has pistols, but he will hardly fire at me."

Forrest ascended the ladder lightly and crept into the hole; it was too low to take him in upright, but his ingress was very rapidly made, and his voice rang out, clear and fearless, at the same instant, "Halloa! who's here?"

There was no response, no movement, so he began to move about amongst the hay, and soon perceived that he was in close contact

with a man who, shaking himself free from the hay with which he had been covered, grasped his hand and said, in a voice not to be mistaken, but tremulous enough,—

"Mr. Forrest, you will not apprehend me—you will help me to escape—you *must* help us, for your own sake and for the Madonna, you know!"

Mr. Forrest paused. Must he? "I could not, Jones; I could not if I would. But how is this?"

"Well, then, I surrender to you, Mr. Forrest; but I would not to any other man; it would be a struggle to the death—mind, I admit nothing, and nothing can be proved against me," said Jones, his suave manner all gone, and defiance breathing from his whole frame, as he preceded Mr. Forrest down the ladder and fell into the hands of his waiting captors.

After that involuntary concession to the exigencies of his hard situation, the captain recovered his coolness and much of his dignity of manner. He even explained his choice of concluding his night's rest in a hay-loft by saying, he never could endure a second

person in his sleeping-apartment, it made him so nervous. Knowing that there could be nothing reliable to witness against him, for he bore no illegal spoil about his person, he felt that all depended on himself; and that he had only to meet Mr. Cotswold's asseverations with his own. "It was very absurd," he said, "but he supposed a man must pay for his eccentricities, and he had no objection to satisfy the public mind if it had conceived certain prejudices against him." He extended his white hand with a courteous air when the handcuffs were produced, and smiled when it was joined with the rough one of his temporary yokefellow.

Mr. Forrest, feeling especially awkward and self-convicted, called for his horse and rode home, leaving the public officers to do what they might consider their duty. Any undue shamefacedness not being natural to their calling, these men agreed with Mr. Cotswold that a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush; insinuating that no harm could be done in keeping their prisoner safely caged, even should he happen to be the wrong man. No particular stringency, however, seeming

necessary with this amenable gentleman, they breakfasted together and then drove leisurely towards the county town. Mr. Cameron, who was going there on his own business, had preceded the prisoner and his guard.

Soon after the convoy had left the inn-yard a young man stepped up to the gig which contained the prisoner, and was about to address him, when Jones pointed to his fettered wrist and motioned him away with a look of ominous warning. The youth stood for a second as if spell-bound, and then walked away towards the Fen Lanes.

CHAPTER XIII.

WILL FLETCHER IN TROUBLE.

THE course of the next two days was a serious affair to Will Fletcher, for it was Will who had been grooming the captain's horse, when he had been so suddenly put to flight by the searching party, and who had faced his dishonoured chief on his forced way to the county jail. Will retreated in a most perplexed state of mind; conscious that he had got into a strange entanglement that looked fateful enough, and full of uncomfortable responsibilities, without any actual concession or choice of his own. He only meant to enjoy himself, just to do what seemed easy and pleasant, without making such a dreary fuss about life, as his father and most people he knew were in the habit of doing; and here he was, with that horse

thrown upon his hands—a splendid creature, actually beloved, and doomed to perish, or be stolen if he fled; and he had beheld his uncle, the only man after his own heart, shorn of all his great and redoubtable capabilities, unable even to lift his hand of his own volition. Though there had been no assurance on his part that the captain was living always in the shadow of prison walls, still Will knew enough to feel pretty sure that he would be expected to know much more if he were caught, and that his capture might be considered a desirable thing; yet how was he to exist underground, with very little besides the horse's corn and the horse's companionship? About noon he stole forth again, just to refresh his spirits with a sight of the free earth, but went back again at dusk, when he found that even this resource was cut off. When, after infinite subtilty, he contrived to reach the farm-house and with his false keys to penetrate to the cavern stable, it was empty; and his desolation was complete. By the evening of the second day his energy seemed utterly collapsed, and he could think of nothing but of

a return to the social system and the refuge of his old home at Box Court.

It was dark when he entered Framborough, and seeing one of his old companions closing his master's shop, he could not pass without speaking. The great event of the hour, the highway robbery and capture of the supposed criminal, was immediately entered upon; and Will heard that his uncle was committed to take his trial at the assizes;—"and they say," his informant added, "that Captain Jones had an accomplice who has managed to get away, leaving Jones to bear the full brunt of his misfortune."

"What makes people think so?" Will asked uneasily.

The shopman told all that was reported about the freshly-groomed horse, and the appearance of the stable, as only just vacated, while it was known that Jones was in the hay-loft. He had also heard that the constable, on his oath before the magistrates, had declared that as he was going up the ladder after Mr. Forrest, he had overheard a conversation between Forrest and the captain, when the latter had said, he must for his own

sake help them to get off, and for the sake of the Madonna. People had talked about Mr. Forrest a good deal being so familiar with such a character; and he went in quite free-and-easy, as if he knew who was there; and they said he wiped his forehead and looked very white when he was giving his evidence. It was even insinuated that he must have helped Captain Jones to hide Mr. Cotswold's purse, for it could not be found any where. All that would have to be cleared up at the trial, the man declared, with earnest decision, to the half-famished lad, who also turned white, and, thrusting his hand into the pocket of his trousers, asked, anxiously, "But what makes folks think it was the captain that robbed Cotswold at all? It might be somebody else, you know."

"Oh, the police know what they are about; and they say they have had an eye on him for some months, and on you too, for that matter, Master Fletcher."

Now whether or not this young shopman had kept Will standing in the street to draw upon him by some chance these very prescient eyes, the thought occurred to the unhappy

fellow, and he felt a frightful accession of nervous concern for himself and friends. He slunk into a by-street and got to his own door, half dead with fear, and trembling with the weakness his long, lonely fast had produced. Concluding that his father was gone to diffuse his wisdom amongst his less favoured companions, and that Kitty was at meeting, Will went to the back of the house, and, looking through the wide window by which the stocking-frame of the hosier stood, he saw his sister seated in a cushioned chair, less like a being of mortal mould than any one he had ever beheld, and a young man standing by her side apparently directing her attention to something in a book. His own anxieties seemed at once to fall away, and he pressed closer to the window-pane, troubled by the sight of this unearthly-looking maid, and wondering who her visitor could be. Presently, the young man turned his face towards Will, and he recognized Bernard Fielding. Daniel Fletcher had become tired of watching and waiting by his daughter, and was glad to give up his trust to any one who would take it; and Bernard had dis-

covered that he could be more to the failing girl, whose faith was so quick and whose sensibilities were so tormenting, than her anxious father, or even her exacting minister. He saw that he was smoothing the dark and rugged way for her, and he did not believe that his comfort was without the pale of the law, or his gentler guidance apart from the evangel of love and peace. So he went most days, sometimes at noon and sometimes at night; and latterly he had never gone away without singing to Kitty a hymn of his own making or his own choosing.

To Will's unqualified astonishment, this refined and favoured gentleman, whom he knew to be most highly esteemed by many grand people, and whose name would be a pass-word any where, was actually making himself quite at home in his father's kitchen, and using his divine gift of song for the sole gratification of his poor sister.

Bernard looked as happy, and his voice sounded as rich and beautiful, as if he had been singing in gilded halls before an applauding multitude. Who knows, indeed, how his audience was extended? It was a

matter of indifference, so long as he saw that grateful, rapturous look on Kitty's face. Those who had said that Bernard Fielding's character was too bright and freely joyous for earth's severer moods, should have stood with Will Fletcher that night and seen, as he saw, the radiance Bernard's presence spread over these two children of poverty and error, and felt, as Will felt, the overpowering sympathy of a good and tender soul. They would never think any more that a glad, transparent nature, one ever ready to reflect light and love, can be inappropriate in any aspect of God's providence.

Will had no partiality for hymns; those he had heard his sister sing being of a self-abasing or obscure sort, that did not accord with his notions of himself or things in general, and he wondered to hear Bernard singing of peace, and love, and joy, while Kitty listened with such untroubled faith, such perfect confidence. The scene impressed him strongly; and he felt that he too might come within the sphere of this kindly and happy person, and be helped by him.

Waiting until he perceived signs of a speedy departure, he went to the street door and met Bernard on the threshold.

"Please come in again for a few minutes," he said; "you will not refuse to help me too, Mr. Bernard?"

"Will, is that you? Oh, I am so glad!" Kitty exclaimed, instantly, her voice sounding very weak, but pleased and eager. "I thought I should never see you any more," she added, as the young men both came in.

Will locked the door before he spoke again; then he kissed his sister—an excess he had not committed for years, but her greeting and frail appearance had touched his heart. "Will you help me to get away, Mr. Fielding?" he asked, not knowing how to adapt himself to any course but quick flight from his entanglements.

"Have you not been away long enough? Where do you want to go to now?" Bernard asked, pitying the poor lad; he looked so unnaturally anxious and wild.

"I don't care where. Any where out of sight and mind."

"But, Will, why do you wish to continue

this useless, cowardly way of living? It would surely be much better to bear the brunt of what there is to be borne like a man, instead of hiding and skulking as you have been doing for months!"

"No one can be more anxious to act like a man than I am," said Will, with a tragic air. "But every thing is gone against me; and I am worse fixed now than ever."

Kitty looked frightened; but Bernard said, gently, "You seem to have got some exaggerated ideas, or you are worse than any of us have thought you. Mr. Cameron certainly wants you to clear up that affair of Mr. Elton's shop robbery; and you know best how deeply you are implicated; but if you could make some reparation to society for your mad pranks and do your old master any good, surely you are ready! You might as well be in prison at once as living in this miserable, lawless way."

"Oh, I was not thinking of Mr. Cameron at all. There is something worse than all that. Now, Kitty, you need not look ready to faint, I'm not so bad, and I never meant to be; and if you and father had not been

so fond of being dismal I should not have been driven to larking. One thing has led on another in a way I never expected."

"You must explain yourself," said Bernard, repressing the smile that he felt would be mischievous and inappropriate.

"I suppose you don't know where I have been lately?" he asked, shyly.

"Yes, we do; you have been with Aunt Sophy and her husband for a long time," Kitty said, wishing to relieve her brother from his apparent embarrassment.

"I have been in a cavern most of the time, underground, a-grooming a horse. It was not particularly lively for a young fellow who has got into all his scrapes just because he didn't like being moped; but I could have put up with that, for the horse was as sensible as many a Christian; and the nights made up for it sometimes. Does Kitty know about Captain Jones, Mr. Fielding?" Will asked, in a whisper.

Kitty heard the question. "Yes, father told me; but you went away before he was taken up," she said, a terrible fear stealing over her.

"I was not aware that Kitty knew any thing about it. The captain may not be a freebooter except in the imagination of frightened people, and it is not worth while to make ourselves anxious over a matter that may be soon all cleared away," Bernard said, wishing the girl's feelings could be spared; but fearing that Will had said too much to make further reticence possible.

"I was a-grooming the captain's horse about twenty minutes before he was taken," said Will, resolutely, as if determined to make a clean breast now. "The captain had been out without me that night, and the horse came home by himself; he did so sometimes, knocking at the door with his fore-foot and standing by it till I came from inside and let him in. I always thought he must have belonged to a circus, he was so sensible and cunning. I was rubbing him down very busy, for he had been ridden hard, and whistling low, and the horse was full of play, running at me full tilt, as if he would knock me down with his great broad chest, and then starting back, when we heard people overhead stamping about, and then

dogs barked. I thought I might as well get out of the way if I could, so I ran and just got clear of a lot of men who were on the look-out for the captain. I saw him afterwards handcuffed; and I have been told that the police are looking out for an accomplice: they say there must be one; you have heard that, Mr. Fielding?"

"Yes; I have heard, too, that this accomplice has, in all probability, carried away Mr. Cotswold's purse. Is there any truth in this?" Bernard asked, fixing a very penetrating look on the face of the unfortunate groom.

Will evaded the question by another. "I thought you said just now that you did not believe Captain Jones was the freebooter?"

"Oh, Will, how can you?" Kitty exclaimed, growing more and more alarmed, yet finding it impossible to believe that her brother was actually leagued with a highway robber.

Bernard spoke mildly but sternly. "Don't prevaricate, young man. If you know any thing about this robbery, you will have to speak out, and plainly too. If you have had

any hand in it I cannot be an accomplice in your escape."

Recalled at once to a sense of the seriousness of his position, and seeing that any evasion might increase suspicion, Will declared positively that he was in no respect, so far as he knew, an accomplice in any act of the captain's worse than gambling. "We used to go to the big towns sometimes to play. We met a lot of sharpers, and I was scarcely a match for them; but the captain said I was a keen hand and should not disgrace him in time. He was no flat, I knew, and made a good thing of it. He could never be driven to robbery, for I know he got a good living in the other way. I've seen him pocket gold often." Will looked guiltless; despite his false ideas and his foolish pride in the black-leg's assertion that he would not disgrace his calling, he did not look as if he had been implicated in the crime for which his master was awaiting his trial in jail. Still his mind seemed haunted by some idea that he must be made responsible for much if he were captured; at any rate, he reverted with persistency to the most fatal part of the

charge, the making away with the cheese-factor's purse. "Did you hear that Mr. Forrest was accused of helping Captain Jones to hide that purse?" he asked. "You know they were busy talking together in the loft."

"Certainly not! no one could be so insane as to suppose Mr. Forrest and Jones could have any thing in common."

"But people do say so. I heard it just now as I came here, and it will come on at the trial. It is said those two were like hand-and-glove; and the captain was heard to say Mr. Forrest must help him for the Madonna's sake. That was Aunt Sophy's name."

"You had better not repeat these idle stories. Surely one crime is enough at once. We don't want to see them multiplying themselves like flies over a cesspool."

"I have found a purse of gold in a little secret pocket of that horse's saddle when he has come home alone," said Will. "I wonder if any one has looked there now. The horse and all his belongings were taken away after I left the stable. I went back to sleep there and found it empty."

If Will knew any more, he kept his knowledge to himself, but retained his conviction that he ought to keep out of the way. Bernard reasoned with him long, trying to convince him that he would be much safer, and in all respects better off, if he surrendered himself, trusting all the rest to Mr. Cameron.

Before he went away Will appeared to yield. "Let me have a night to think of it," he said.

As soon as Bernard was gone the nervous dread of being caught settled over him again.

"I could not bear it, Kitty," he said. "I might have to say something that would go against the captain, and he was so good to me."

"Have you not told Mr. Fielding all you know, then?" Kitty asked, taking his hand and looking pitifully into his face.

"No, I have not told him all; but what I have said is true."

CHAPTER XIV.

CONFERENCES.

WHAT passed during the next half-hour between Kitty and Will Fletcher can only be guessed by the consequences. They were not likely to prove exceptions to the benign bond of fraternal love, which works sometimes strongly and blindly as instinct, and with a fidelity that might put our solemnly consecrated pacts to shame.

When their father came home he found his daughter alone; and she said no word of having seen her brother that night.

Bernard Fielding called on Mr. Cameron to tell him of the meeting with Will. Both regretted for Kitty's sake, it would be hard that the lad should be brought to trouble just now; but they did not see how this was to be avoided, since he had put himself in the way. "We must not lose sight of him again,

he may prove a most valuable witness at Captain Jones' trial," Bernard said.

Mr. Cameron looked up in his quick, imperative way. "How is that?" he asked.

"You knew he was living at the Fen Farm with Jones?"

"Yes, up to the time that Mr. Forrest ejected the family."

"Will was there up to the present day, acting as groom to this wonderful black horse you found underground."

"Indeed! then if Jones be the criminal, Will must have been an accomplice?"

"He has been an accomplice in a regular system of gambling; but I believe he is innocent of any graver crime. He admitted too much in his account of himself to have been aware of the fatal importance of what he was saying, and he looked innocent."

"So did Jones, for that matter; but I believe in his guilt."

"Ay, but Will is so young, and the captain is in his maturity. The soul does not get its mask well on till after thirty—in old age it generally falls off again," said Bernard, with his generalizing habit.

Well as Mr. Cameron thought of Bernard, these poetical vagaries of his, as he styled some of his habits of thought, irritated him; especially if any matter like business was before them; so he asked, rather impatiently, if any thing of importance had been divulged.

"I think so; but you shall judge," said Bernard, who then repeated all that Will had just told about himself and the singular pranks of the animal he had had under his care.

Mr. Cameron listened with gathering brows. "This is very strange," he said, after some deep thought. "I heard Cotswold's evidence before the Bench—at least, a good part of it—and he talked about something coming suddenly out of the darkness and giving him a violent blow on the breast. So far as I could make him out, he represented it as a snorting blow with great fiery eyes. Of course I thought it was all a bag of moonshine; but a powerful black horse pressed forward furiously, and breasting a man also riding fast, but with wits that had scarcely overtaken him since leaving the dinner-table, would be very likely:

to produce some such effect as this. The captain may have spent some of his spare time and talent in training his animal to such a purpose. Cotswold explained that this blow was broader and heavier than a man's hand could give, and unhorsed him instantaneously; that it came at the same moment with the flash from the pistol; and so he thought there must have been two assailants, though he he did not suppose he was struck by any murderous instrument. All this looks as if the horse had really been the accomplice, and may have borne away the purse too, as Will suggested. And if he had once found a purse of gold in the secret pocket of the saddle, is it not possible that he would look again? Is it not more than probable that he did look that morning and found Cotswold's purse?"

Bernard started. "What a fool I was not to think of this! I never even asked him about it. Ah, but I recollect—he could not have found this purse, for he wondered if any one had looked in the secret pocket, and said all that belonged to the horse was carried away in his absence."

"That is not worth much. The young rascal might be capable of throwing a little dust in the eyes of Mr. Bernard." Cameron's caustic disposition did not enhance the virtue of his wisdom; but Bernard's temper was impregnable.

"Who took possession of the horse and his accoutrements?" he asked.

"I really do not know; we left them in their stable. I don't hear everything, you know, and generally feel as if things were vague."

"Will Fletcher made some extraordinary statement about Mr. Forrest being accused or suspected of being in some way compromised in this affair," said Bernard, with much hesitation; "you understood nothing of the kind, of course?"

"Mr. Forrest had some business transactions with Jones; he did make a sort of convenience of the man; this young Fletcher must have alluded to that."

"No; his remark was in connexion with this very affair of the purse—that Mr. Forrest was suspected of having helped to conceal it. I should not have mentioned

this ridiculous idea even to you, had it originated in Will's own brain; but he said it was talked about; and if this be the case, even amongst these idle young fellows, it is to be regretted."

"Of course it is! Fred Forrest is a gentleman; and though I have had my private pique against him, and do not pretend that his character is immaculate, the public has no cause against him; and such an aspersion is infamous—too infamous indeed to be noticed."

"I think so. It is reported that you were going up to the hay-loft to meet the supposed robber, when Mr. Forrest pushed you aside; that he had ventured fearlessly where even the practised and licensed officers hesitated to show themselves. Do you suppose he thought it was Jones?"

"I should think not. Forrest pushed me aside because of this infirmity of hearing. It was a very kindly return for my unmannerly attack at the sheep-washing. I have felt the glow of the retributive fire on my head ever since," said Cameron.

"Was there time while they were together

in that loft for any conversation?—We are all friends, and are speaking in honourable regard;—now Will says that evidence was given before the magistrates, to the effect, that the constable heard Jones say, Mr. Forrest must save him for his own sake and the Madonna's; and that this was the name the captain gave his wife, whom we know as Sophy Fletcher."

"Ay, I heard something of this; but I thought Jones must be a Catholic, and using one of his ordinary forms of adjuration. Still, all things considered, if Captain Jones made his wife his mediator it was no wonder, and no great matter."

Bernard looked surprised, but not seeing any invitation in his friend's face to further explanation, he asked no more questions.

"It would be cruel to send an officer of justice to Box Court to-night?" Mr. Cameron asked, feeling that he ought to do so, harsh as such a course would be, and therefore open to counsel.

"It would be cruel," said Bernard, decisively. "Kitty's life hangs by a thread; a rude hand would snap it in a moment; and

I do not see that any good end would be answered. Will gave me his word that he would come to you in the morning and trust to your mercy not to be too hard upon him," Bernard said, and then retired.

CHAPTER XV.

AN OLD FRIEND AT WYCKAM.

WHATEVER may be the cause of this peculiar tendency of human nature, certain it is that a committed crime unsettles the moral rectitude of its locality. It is a strange law to which we subject ourselves; instead of putting on the sackcloth of a sympathetic penitence and sitting amongst the ashes of humiliation; instead of girding ourselves and going forth in the light of whatever truth and sense there may be within us, to help or to purify, we at once loosen our moralities, cry halloo to human frailties, and add to the catalogue of sins that of evil speaking. The moral system receives a shock very readily. After any injudicious blazonry, crime seems to increase with fatal facility; even those whose names are amongst the

virtuous often feel an unusual impulse to destroy character, or filch a man's good name.

After Captain Jones had been committed for robbing Mr. Cotswold between the Spinnies that November night, while there was no light in the heavens to reveal the deed, and very little in Mr. Cotswold's brain to take cognizance of it, people began to talk strangely about Mr. Forrest. The respectable old hall that had sheltered so many goodly souls, and the creditable old name which had been honoured by as many more, even the gentle youth and genial manhood of the present representative were no guarantee against the calumny of idle tongues. Who uttered the first mischievous word that set afire the train of lurid scandal will probably never be known. It was set afire, and sputtered and hissed through one social system after another, until the slander was too potent to be smothered or ignored even by the victim's personal friends. Of course it was whispered at the ladies' whist club; but only as an outrageous scandal to be mentioned not, except amongst most inti-

mate and partial acquaintances. That there was some compact of a secret nature between Mr. Forrest and Captain Jones was too well known; and what could it be but a mutual knowledge of the captain's vicious mode of living? Therefore a mutual guilt must be conceded in this matter.

"Not that any one could for a moment suspect Mr. Forrest of having any thing to do with these highway robberies—that would be ridiculous," said Mrs. Poole, venturing first, by virtue of her intimacy with the master of Wyckam, to give a form to the innuendoes that had been floating throughout the club for two evenings, though she coloured violently at her temerity and shuffled her cards so vigorously that they mostly went back to their first order. "But, you know, he might, out of pity, or that curious impulse that comes upon us all sometimes, to do just the wrong thing when it is most important that we should not, take the purse out of the captain's hand and put it into his pocket—of course with no idea of keeping it or of being suspected of having it."

"I don't think gentlemen do let their feel-

ings get the better of their judgment as we do," said Mrs. Fielding quietly. "I daresay they do wrong sometimes, but not in that accidental way. Mr. Forrest would naturally feel how awkward it would be to have a purse of money that belonged to some one else, and which he could not give up without ever so much trouble and misconception."

"Why should he not bring it forward and say he found it in the old farm-house? Scores of people do that sort of thing," Mrs. Elton suggested, whose mind was rather apt at realizing—perhaps in consequence of the shock her nerves had received by her own home tragedy.

Mrs. Cameron, whose failing strength had rendered her almost an honorary member, but who could not yet relinquish the habit of years, looked sternly over her spectacles at the little party of amiable sophists as she said, "I should propose, as the most friendly step to be taken next, that we advise Mr. Forrest of these rumours, that he may be enabled to explain for himself."

Little Mrs. Poole winced under the sarcasm;

but the more literal Mrs. Elton thought there was no one who would like to undertake such a duty, unless it were Mrs. Cameron's son George, whose courage seldom failed him, especially in disagreeable circumstances, as he had shown in more cases than need be mentioned.

Fortunately at this moment the name of this redoubtable righter of wrongs was announced; and with the name came Mrs. Cameron's hood and cloak. Latterly, owing to her increasing feebleness, which was as evident to herself as to her friends, and to her supposed strength of character, which had never been known to yield to ordinary frailties, a little comedy was amiably enacted each evening at the parting hour, but whoever was deceived, it was certainly not the clear minded invalid. So when Bernard entered his mother's parlour at nine o'clock and said he was going to Castle Street for half an hour's talk, Mrs. Cameron rose, prepared for the implied escort; and when the rendezvous was at Mrs. Poole's, or elsewhere, and George called, saying he was walking that way and thought he might as well look in, a smile

flitted over the old grave face, and the gratified, yet proud old lady thought they might as well walk home together. She was not blind either to the apparent incongruity, of continuing to frequent these whist parties with one foot already in her grave; but was quite aware that she was the subject of much severe conscientious concern. Still she was willing to afford her better neighbours this exercise of their friendly zeal on her behalf, for, as she told her reverend expostulator, there was the livelong night for thinking and the day for working, and that was quite as much as she was equal to; and she had no idea that her two hours of harmless relaxation would be envied by the purer intelligences. As for conversation, she had to reply, in consequence of some suggestion, they managed to get in plenty of gossip; and she could not perceive its superior virtue or utility.

The gossip had irritated Mrs. Cameron especially on this last evening; and as she was going home with her son she said, "Mrs. Poole's party was virulent to-night. I must tell you the subject that put our

whist behind us; I was tempted to throw my cards at that slanderous little woman's head." Then she told of this evil report concerning the master of Wyckam.

"It is infamous to speak in this way of Frederick Forrest," she added, when they were at home and the gossip of the evening had been repeated. "I have never cared for the chatter of idle women, it has seemed about as ineffectual as the crackling of thorns under a pot is said to be; but, really, when it comes to any thing like this, it is enough to frighten one into a vow of perpetual silence. Of course you have heard nothing of this?" she asked, surprised at her son's taciturnity.

"Yes, I am sorry to say men are not much more tender of another's reputation than women; indeed they are more mischievous, because their charges are heavier, not being burnished by any play of the imagination or sentiment," said George.

"Why did you not tell me? I am safe when my friends are concerned; and I always liked Fred; his mother and I were cousins, and respected each other, independently of our mutual satisfaction with the same ancestry."

"I did not like to hear such things hinted about Fred; you know I would rather lash him than speak or think badly of him. I was vexed with Bernard for retailing what he had heard; though he did it in pure faith, and for the best purpose."

"Poor Fred! This will worry him terribly; and he is so sensitive to public opinion, and this is such a degrading scandal! Cannot something be done to make people hold their tongues?"

"I am afraid not, if even the whist club cannot be reticent."

"It was proposed by one of your friends to-night that you should go and tell him how freely and discreditably his name is being used—I thought it great impertinence in Mrs. Elton; but what do you think about it?"

"I think you have talked quite enough to-night, you must have your negus and go to bed, or I shall have you on my hands as well as Forrest."

This negus, which Mrs. Cameron insisted upon preparing herself, and which she had lately consented to take as a great concession to public opinion, was composed of hot water

slightly flavoured with port wine, and well sweetened. It was the only stimulant she ever took, and it was too late to prepare her constitution for artificial methods now.

As she sat sipping her simple beverage, George appearing more attainable than usual, little scraps of her peculiar wisdom fell from her tongue; while he, though never complimentary even in idea, and scarcely gracious enough to give any woman her due, could not help listening and glancing towards her from time to time. She had certainly softened and mellowed wonderfully during the last few months, either from consideration of his infirmity or from the glow that life's one great event now and then casts before it. He was thinking she was something like an old Cremona violin, deftly made and sedulously played on by the peopled years, and therefore vibrating so readily to the lightest touch of the great Performer now. He might have said so had the tenor of their communion been different; now, of course, it would be too affected to make any such gentle allusions.

"Nothing will keep this scandal from having its mischievous way," she said. "The

public mind is like a great water-tank, safe so long as there is no fracture; afterwards there is no more reliance till the flood has borne all down before it."

George sat thinking, his teeth firmly set and the corners of his mouth working, as his habit was when mentally disturbed. "Suppose you put yourself in the fissure, mother?" he said.

"Why do you deride me? Surely this is a serious matter for Fred Forrest and his friends!"

"I am serious. I have been listening to you for the last half-hour and thinking that you would do as much good by calling at Wyckam Hall as could be done by any means just now. Will you go to-morrow?"

Mrs. Cameron felt surprised; but she merely asked, "Do you mean to talk to Fred about these reports?"

"Not unless he leads up to them. But you are so well known in the place, and have been so much respected—besides you look so venerable—a visit from you, made properly, as you used to visit when I was a boy, might be of some service."

This was a greater surprise. Mrs. Cameron, not having the slightest idea that there existed this under-current of respect for her in her son's heart, had almost ceased to consider herself or her influence of any importance. "I am afraid of trying to walk so far," said she, but with a gratified look that showed she was willing to try.

"You must not walk: I shall hire a coach and a pair of horses from the Castle, of course."

"But, George, you know how very extravagant that would be! People would talk; and we are really quite poor."

"I wish people to talk; and we can enter the expense on the debtor side of our account with humanity. Fred may be glad to consult with you."

"You overrate my influence. Remember, I am not so honourable as I once was: we are down in the world," the old lady remonstrated.

"Why, mother, I did not know you had become such a heretic! Surely it was you who first taught me that age was honourable; or was it that ancient fireplace in your cham-

ber, where the Scripture-lessons are illustrated by Dutch tiles? Whatever was my source, now I believe that, if we are not here to become more honourable the longer we remain, why the shorter our stay the better."

Mr. Cameron pushed his chair noisily away from the fire, as if he were half ashamed of being so didactic before his mother, and would fain drown a portion of his morality.

The next day Mrs. Cameron drove up to Wyckam Hall; and Mr. Forrest, pleased and proud to see his old friend once more within his doors, welcomed her warmly, though she perceived the passion of shame that gave such an unusual tone to all he said and did. She felt at once that her son was right in sending her thither, and that she would do well to leave what comfort she could behind her, and so would exert all her powers to win the confidence and the old regard, not omitting the little diplomatic interlude she had intended on behalf of another.

Whether or not she would prove a mother-in-law sufficiently exceptional to take delight in Mary Elton, if she were her son's wife, was a question too remote for consideration; we

should cease to be agents at all in the procession of the generations, if the edge of every possible event were turned towards the light of our criticisms. Still, while she knew that this only son of her old age was running to seed prematurely for want of the ministering, restraining care of this very girl, it was impossible to withhold a helping-hand.

Mrs. Cameron was shown into the usual family room—a large, low parlour with two broad windows, one overlooking the farmer's fold, the other opening into the garden. These deeply-recessed windows, with their old-fashioned and cosy seats, showed the strength of the walls of Wyckam; indeed every thing belonging to the house indicated a venerable age, which the present owner liked to preserve. The garden gave abundant evidence of the rich growth of years: the deep, mossy turf of the lawn, the great girth of the tree-boles, the clothed look of every nook and wall, could only come by the kindly hand of time; and, though most of the leaves had fallen from the larger trees, there was not any bareness or discomfort in sight. The purple mist of the afternoon was making the

place seem interminably large and creative; the bright yellow of the mulberry-tree gleaming athwart a vacuity of dark ripe browns, and the straggling branches of a scarlet creeper hanging over the changeful blue of the laurel thicket, seemed like beacons or decoy-flags in the breathing waste.

"Your garden improves, Fred," Mrs. Cameron remarked, as she looked out across the lawn. "That cedar has surely grown; and it measured its life by centuries when I saw it last."

"It always looks so much larger at this time of the year, when its heavy foliage dwarfs the other trees, which seem to shiver in their nakedness beside it," Mr. Forrest said, as he placed a chair from which his visitor could see the garden more easily than his face, which—the sensation of shame being as uncomfortable as novel—he preferred keeping in the shade.

"I suppose you are right; we may improve though with age. But surely you have laid in more ground? I do not remember that park-like expanse."

"No; I have only removed a hedge and

laid a sunk fence down in its place. That is the croft where my mother's favourite pony used to dream away its life. Those fine oaks show to much better advantage without the hedges. You remember old Millie, do you not? Why, I remember seeing you mount her; and the performance took away from your dignity very much."

Mrs. Cameron smiled, a quiet, retrospective expression passing over her pale features.

"Ah, yes, I remember Millie! and I rode her with the utmost self-complacency. I dare say elderly people are seldom quite consistent with the ideas of the young ones. How old scenes annihilate the results of time! I have been feeling as if the end were at hand; and now—why I must be good for a score of years yet!" she said; but she knew it was the past that was animating her, and no prophetic spirit. "We were all young people at Wyckam," she added.

"I fancied you had ceased to care for the place, it is so long since you came to see it," Mr. Forrest remarked, in a low, hesitating tone.

"I was afraid of disturbing the ghosts that always hang about these old places."

The dry, caustic tone that had become Mrs. Cameron's habitual one had returned, and Forrest saw that he was on tender ground, and would have been light and careless if possible; but he could not repress a sigh. He began to talk of his various failures in finding a successor to Mrs. Bray.

"Wyckam deserves a wife at your hands, Fred; why give it any more of these abnormal keepers?"

"I have behaved so very badly in this respect, I fear I shall never recover my position." Forrest looked and spoke as if he were questioning, and sought encouragement.

"Yes, you behaved very shamelessly to Mary Elton. Still, my chief grudge against you in this affair was, that you should have desired her in the first instance."

Great was Forrest's surprise at such an admission; and he asked, with some concern, for an explanation. Mrs. Cameron gave one: "With your graces of person and possession, where might you not have chosen? Indeed I fancy it was a mere caprice that fixed your highness at last, and a caprice which set you free again. Was it not so?"

"Do not call any affection Miss Elton may inspire capricious. She is a noble girl." Forrest did not mean to speak magnanimously; but his hearer was captious when Mary was concerned.

"You need not apologize," she said. "Mary had other lovers who did not care to look elsewhere; but who found their *one* spoiled for them."

Though Mr. Forrest had never thought of George Cameron as a lover of Mary, he was not slow to perceive that the old lady spoke with too much feeling to be a disinterested person, and he was much perplexed, very sorry for the mischief he had made, and not knowing how to mend it—not sure, indeed, that he wished to mend it. Few men like to contemplate their successor, either in loves or lands, though their own interest therein may be dead, but if it be not dead their position is complicated. Mrs. Cameron did not mean to silence him or put him to shame. She was only like some diplomatic parents, wishing to know what his intentions really were; for she was convinced that nothing short of his actual marriage with some other

lady would induce her chivalrous son to feel himself at liberty to address Mary; and knowing where his heart was set, and that very soon he must be quite alone, she was anxious for some little foreknowledge of what might be. In this truly feminine way she had translated her mission to Wyckam. The scandal would right itself; but George Cameron never would make his own way straight or pleasant, and she felt bound to remove some of the impediments.

"I shall never marry now," said Forrest, all the misery and degradation the last few weeks had heaped upon him returning to his consciousness in full force. "I shall leave England as soon as this trial is over."

"That would be treacherous on your part to this beautiful heritage; besides a man has no right to run away from his trials."

"I can do better for my heritage than by remaining to disgrace it. Mr. Cumming has written more than once to ask me if I will not reconsider the proposal he made to purchase the place. Why should he not have it on a lease?"

Mrs. Cameron felt for the son of her old

friend, foolishly as he had trifled with his life and its promises till he seemed no better, and scarcely worse, than a puppet in the hands of a capricious destiny. She looked at him almost as his mother might have done, as she said, "Fred, you were an only child, and I am not quite sure whether the only one be not as subtily tried as he is sorely trying. At any rate, I have been ready to make much excuse for some of your irregular proceedings, and truly you are paying heavily for them now. Still you must not run away. Face the trial coolly and bravely; answer your subpœna and all that it may entail; and take no notice of these charges. They ought to glide past even now, without attracting one glance from Frederick Forrest's eyes."

"Of course they ought, but Frederick Forrest was not immaculate. These things of the kennel are avenging themselves for my gross regard of them in past times."

"Nay, you are no fatalist! Nothing lower than ourselves can have any power over us. What are you the worse if a number of ignorant and envious people are capable of generating a vile falsehood and attaching it

to the first gentleman who may present any thing like a sensitiveness to it?"

"Dear Mrs. Cameron, your own goodness in coming to see me just now, when I know the town is set against me, has opened my eyes to the actualities of my position more completely than even the dead cut I got this morning from two of your civic magnates, or than that mobbing the factory youths and maidens honoured me with on the last market day I spent at Framborough. That insane cry, 'Who hid the cheesefactor's purse?' will never leave my ears again." Forrest shuddered as he forced himself to repeat the odious words. "You knew this," he added, "and probably much more. You have not visited Wyckam for ten years; and now your visit is not to me so much as to my house. It is a mission of mercy."

"It is nothing of the kind; I should have turned my face the other way if I had suspected myself of any feeling of patronage. If George and my own foolish ailments will let me, I shall go to the assizes to see how bravely Jane Forrest's son can deport himself, in his first great conflict with a censorious world."

"I deserve it all!" Forrest exclaimed, as if in despite of himself. "I deserve to be held in evil repute; and I cannot have you alone deceived into respecting me any longer. I spoke truly and not fatuously when I said the things of the kennel were avenging themselves on me."

"I did not say I respected you, Fred; but I know several worthier people who do. I only love you, and wish you had proved as noble as your mother thought you."

"What do you mean?" Forrest asked, sharply, naturally preferring his own estimate of himself, either for good or evil, and jealous of his reputation even while admitting that it was gone.

Mrs. Cameron rose to go. She was tall and stately as ever, and the handsome gown and shawl, well-preserved relics of a prouder past, had never been more worthily worn. Still there were certain tokens in face and figure, a languor that could not care to hide the spirit's overmastering impulses, tokens of detachment from ordinary interests, which must affect a friend profoundly.

"The horses will be getting cold, Fred; we must say good-bye."

She spoke cheerfully, but was evidently tired, and Forrest saw the lingering, wistful glance that said, plainly, "It is the last time." He was deeply touched by this proof of her affection for him and his house, penitent and softened before this strength of soul and disinterested kindness. Saying a word about hastening the tea, he left the room for an instant, and then, returning, gently placed Mrs. Cameron in her chair; and, bending over her so that his lowest tones might be heard, he said, "I cannot let you go on deceiving yourself about me any longer; you are too good and kind; and I am so shamelessly unworthy."

Mrs. Cameron interrupted with an impatient exclamation—"Tut, child! who is worthy, if we come to confession?"

Forrest took the uplifted hand. "I have deceived you and George in a most gross manner, heartlessly and cruelly, considering all things—you who were my earliest and best friends!" he said, hurriedly.

"That could scarcely be; I am not easily deceived, whatever George may be," the old lady replied, shaking her head with much

certitude and looking dangerously enlightened.

"Listen, dear Mrs. Cameron. I must tell you all about it now; this is the only reparation I can make. I did hope to make amends from time to time; but your son was too independent; he gave me no chance."

"None was needed," said Mrs. Cameron, quietly tapping his hand with her finger. "Some people are left to look out for their charities and may not be Christian-hearted enough to do so; others have their obligations laid out on their very hearthstone and cannot close their eyes or steel their hearts. Besides, we were repaid abundantly as we went on. Poor Eve did not turn out badly; at least George thinks well of her."

Mrs. Cameron spoke with perfect composure, though Forrest was in a whirlpool of surprise and confusion at the tenor of her words.

"You do not mean to say that you have been aware all this time that I had any hand in sending Eve to your house?" he asked, amazement partly deadening his shame.

"I guessed who the child was before I

slept the first night she came, Fred. What cause had I for anger, or even offence, that my home was chosen as the one for your little girl?" Mrs. Cameron's voice trembled in spite of her effort at calmness.

Forrest pressed his lips upon the kind old hand in silence.

"Now I ask for some grace, as my reward, if so it please you," she said, resuming her ordinary tone. "You will not leave Wyckam, but, as soon as this rumour has subsided, seek for it a permanent mistress, one of your own age and standing. I think you might find one among the old loves."

CHAPTER XVI.

SOCIETY AVENGES ITSELF.

THROUGH all this time Mrs. Cameron knew no more than any one else of the true state of Mary Elton's feelings concerning her two lovers; but, judging from her own spirit, she concluded that maiden pride so outraged, and maiden trust so betrayed as Mary's had been, must have set her free from the old love, if there were not already a way prepared for another. Those apparently gentle, patient people who keep themselves in a sort of twilight mystery, while perfectly alive to the claims and conditions of all their connexions, are never to be calculated on. If they love it will probably be for ever, because they have created much and idealized the whole. Mary had no thought of having been wronged; she was aware from

what a wide and ample field of charming women Mr. Forrest had turned when he had chosen her, and what a terrible revulsion her life had experienced. Could she wonder, then, that he had fallen away with every thing else that had given splendour and power of bliss? She was bereaved, as a matter of course, of every thing at once with the blow that had destroyed her father; but she was matured, not changed; and she had not to bear, what is perhaps the hardest lot of life, disenchantment with the one beloved. The lover's name, so often spoken in the happy times with all the proud delight parents feel over the daughter's betrothed, listened to with such sweet, rosy consciousness, had been strange in the household since the night of the fatal accident. Either from an idea that his involuntary crime had estranged the lovers, or that his habitual sin was keeping them apart, Mr. Elton never mentioned Forrest's name, never hinted at any possible change; the only sign of interest he ever showed being an occasional wistful, deprecatory look, which the daughter's tender heart found very hard to bear.

The withering scandal on Mr. Forrest's fair fame had not yet reached her, though all the assistants had talked it well over, and Mrs. Elton had heard it repeated many times. The girl's evident sensibility, making her face so interesting, and the modest dignity of her manner, keeping her safe from intrusive remarks; while her mother dreaded any new addition to her already overburdened young life. Two or three times whispers had been interrupted and the once honoured name had been suddenly suppressed as Mary had passed by; but it was not until after Mrs. Cameron's visit to Wyckam that the news was forced upon her.

The family had supped and would have gone their several ways, but Mr. Cameron and Bernard Fielding had just walked in, and a few general remarks were being made, when that heavy, shuffling step, so well known and so much dreaded, was heard approaching. The habits of the unfortunate master had become so confirmed, the various stages of imbecility were understood, and no one chose to meet him after a certain hour. As he was coming home much earlier than usual, it was

expected that he would be in a maudlin, miserable condition, and would most likely station himself by the door, his hat slouched over his broad brows, his thick walking-stick in his hand, and his ill-tempered, but faithful terrier at his heels, ready to bark violently if his voice rose a tone, and to bite any one who might come too near. This dog, which was known all over the town as Jem Elton, was so penetrated by his master's influence as to seem a sort of familiar spirit. Night or day they were never many yards apart; and though the animal had, during the greater part of the time, a decided advantage in most of the conditions essential to intelligent beings, he was not much more respected than the man; for he too had gone out of his proper sphere, and had become a cogitative dog. He was, in fact, an accomplice, a moral agent in an immoral cause, so weirdly knowing that he must have calculated to a nicety the degrees of incapacity into which his owner was falling, and regulating his conduct so that he was ultra-vigilant, important, and capable as his charge was least so. This general feeling against the terrier

was not, however, shared by Mary; she was grateful to the poor little creature because he had undertaken a painful responsibility that could be supported by no one else, and which nothing could induce him to forego. Jem's only moments of exemption from care were when she took him on her lap and stroked his upright ears, talking the while to him about those overpowering and occult anxieties which made him so irritable and unpopular; then his sparkling eyes would half close for a moment or glance from the occupant of the great arm-chair to the pretty mistress, as if he were congratulating himself and her on a partial lull in his responsible existence.

Mr. Elton opened the room-door just as every one was rising, to get out if possible; and placed his stout, stolid figure so that no person could pass. It was his custom, acquitted with a solemnity that made it appear a conscientious compact between himself and the society he so outraged, to address his wife first, charging her with being what she was, and consequently not what she ought to be. The patient wife never replied, she did not even wince

when there were no strangers by; but though a ready and safe target for all his offensive aims, it was a pitiable thing to see how she, as well as everything else, human or divine, had suffered through the perversion of this unhappy man's mind.

The presence of Mr. Cameron and Bernard and the young men and women of the establishment being no restraint to him, he delivered his conjugal homily as if he saw no others; and then, turning to Bernard, he said some half-coherent things about angels leaving their wings in the wrong place, and trying to walk through a dark and dirty world without the help of God or man, and of course falling and not daring to show the same front again to God or man, and so getting farther and ever farther from purity and light. Bernard, the votary of every kind of continence, and faithful so far to his idea of human supremacy over human temptations, always shunned Mr. Elton, and could not restrain the shiver and the look of aversion his repulsive presence excited, and yet he was profoundly touched by the miserable look and the sentiment vaguely expressed. He was standing by

Mary, and either the proximity or the expressive glance that passed between them, aroused a hope in the father's mind that Mr. Forrest and his faithlessness might be forgotten and happily superseded. No shade of shame could ever lie over that seared soul now, the natural sympathies were all either blunted or in glaring relief. Pointing towards the two young friends with his thick stick, but addressing Mr. Cameron, Mr. Elton exclaimed, "Oh, it has come to this, has it? Well, I have no objection provided this young gentleman can marry at once; but I will have no more shill-i-shall-i doings with my daughter. She is worthy of the best of them. And now we can tell all the good folks of Framborough that there is another name between my girl's and your fine Mr. Forrest's, who is being held up for infamy by every impudent street rascal that owns a tongue."

"Stay, sir; somebody has been imposing upon you!" said Cameron, attempting to take Mr. Elton's arm to lead him away.

"Do you mean to say you have heard nothing of this charge against Frederick Forrest?" Mr. Elton asked, shaking off the

warning hand. "Why, it is in every one's mouth that he was an accomplice in this highway robbery!"

Mr. Cameron took his arm roughly, and Bernard started forward to arrest what he might of this cruel speech; but Mr. Elton was not to be arrested. Opposition always had made him obstinate, so he proceeded: "An accomplice before the fact by housing and associating with this Captain Jones; and after the fact by helping him to hide the cheesefactor's purse."

As Jem was making noisy and savage attacks on Mr. Cameron's legs for laying hands on the inviolate person of his master, that master's voice was necessarily loud and defiant. Mary heard each word distinctly, but the meaning seemed too obscure and improbable to reach her at once. She could only suppose that her father had caught up some fragments of street calumny and had altogether misapplied them; but this absurd charge coming immediately after the outrage her modesty had just incurred, made her heart burn. The young shop-women, expecting to see her faint or fall into hysterics,

as they no doubt would have done had such an opportunity been offered to them, and seeing her only stand erect, her clenched hand set firmly on the table and her bright eyes looking firmly into her father's face, they thought a confirmation of the story was needed, and hastened to explain that it was quite true that everybody was talking in this way about Mr. Forrest, but perhaps he might be able to clear himself.

This was too much to be borne so publicly. Obstinate as Mr. Elton was before all others, and impervious to reason at all times, a certain tone from his daughter was always potential. It was only now and then, when sorely tried, that she had the heart to command her father; and though he always went away when he saw she wished him to go, it was not always to the most desirable place. She and her mother therefore endured; but with all these people, and this terrible news thrust upon her, she could only say, "Good-night, father. Now, Jem, take him to bed." and she was obeyed.

Bernard Fielding went away with the others; but Mr. Cameron stayed awhile to

answer any questions Mary in her bewilderment might wish to ask, or to promise to do all in his power to silence this shameless rumour. If he had given way to any warm hopes during the last weeks, and suffered himself to think that this cruel wind of calumny might waft a blossom towards him out of sheer caprice, he would not have been guilty of treason to any one. Though it might seem to be one of those exceptionably evil winds, yet it had happened that this little blossom which he only cared for had been idly thrown to its idle humours, and it might chance to be driven towards the open hand. He estimated himself humbly enough, and knew how little reliance can be placed on the manner of any person who is suffering from intense feeling; still he experienced such a flush of something more like bliss than he had known in his whole life when he saw how Mary turned towards him in her trouble, as towards her light and help, that he was fain to look another way, lest exultation and happiness should have transfigured him, and so inopportunely. Mary had no suspicion, and certainly no perception of any thing of

the kind; accustomed to disguise her feelings, to conceal the secret worship of her soul, she disguised it now, never thinking that any one could possibly draw any issues therefrom, that might lead to trouble and greater confusion.

George Cameron had read few love stories and acted none, save this, which he had so jealously suppressed, and which was avenging itself now by assuming a sudden and rare completion. It was excusable if he read love's signs all wrong, such cabalistic signs as they are, with a new mystery and meaning for every new lover. He would, however, keep his own reading for the joy of his own heart for the present, holding no festival over the grave of a friend's fair fame; but he might surely take and hold for a moment the hand that Mary, in her anxiety, stretched towards him, as she indicated that, his natural place being always foremost in the struggle against wrong, he would use every effort to silence the people who had let their depravity take this inconceivably wicked form. "But who could have thought of such a thing? Most rumours had something to

spring from; but this one was surely the freak of insanity!" she said.

Mr. Cameron told her how his first intimation had come; and that he was trying to make Daniel Fletcher confess as to the authorship.

"Do you think Mr. Forrest has heard any thing of this report?" Mary asked.

"Yes, he knows; my mother and he talked it over some few days ago at Wyckam."

"And you—have you seen him since?"

"I have only just seen him; we have had no conversation about it yet."

"But you will go and talk to him? All his friends should rally about him now. This must be so hard to bear, you know; and you would be a great help and comfort."

Mr. Cameron smiled and promised he would go when he had done all he could in Framborough. And Mary looked so full of confidence in his diplomacy, and her trust in him was so sweet and flattering, he was tempted to try an experiment, the result of which might be some guide as to whether he were foolishly deluding himself or might open his heart to some of life's sweet and glad

influences, even as other men could; so he said, "Mr. Forrest spoke of leaving England as soon as the trial was over. He even entertained some idea of parting with his Wyckam property; feeling himself clear of all ties, he has only himself to please." Keen politician and subtle thinker as this man was, he was such a tyro in the simple wiles a mere boy in love would know how to exercise, that while making his little experiment he failed to take any note of the result. He was too much moved and abashed at his own effrontery, and could not look into the maiden's face while applying the touchstone to her heart; so he did not see the wretched, startled look that gave such an unnatural expression to that face, or the shy glance towards him which quickly succeeded—a glance given in fear lest her infatuated fidelity should have betrayed itself.

"You would not advise such a step, would you?" she asked, soon recovering her calmer manner.

"I believe my mother tried to dissuade him from going abroad—but he might be better away for awhile."

"Nay, you cannot think so. Such a mass of half-developed suspicion would accumulate about his name if he were absent. These idle maledictions, vague and unmeaning now, would crystallize around his memory, and he would exaggerate his evil reputation so that he would feel as if his home were quite alien and forbidden to him."

"Will you tell him all this?" George asked, still feeling rather ashamed of himself, but driven on by his temptation to know a little more.

"I tell him?" Mary exclaimed, for the first time a vivid blush softening her features, which had been white and rigid all this time. "We never meet now, you know."

"I did not know that; but I am very glad."

"Are you?"

The caustic tone of Mary's reply recalled him to a sense of his apparent heartlessness, so he added, quickly, "Well, Mary, you and I are very old friends, and I must say I never thought Fred Forrest worthy of you. And now good-night! You will forgive me for this mistake, if I work hard against this slander

every day and come to tell you the result every night, will you not? May I do so?"

"Dear, kind Mr. Cameron, why do you ask such a question? Don't you know you are always welcome here! Of course we have fancied that no one could like to come now, but I shall be only too glad." Her voice sank low and her honest hand gratefully returned the pressure of his; and he went away with that unfamiliar epithet sounding most musically and persistently. Low as it was spoken it must have been an inner sense that took it in, as surely as it was a fine inner sense that kept that gentle hand-pressure so quick and warm.

He did not fail in either promise. In the matter of the slander against Mr. Forrest he could not get beyond Daniel Fletcher; and he did not believe he was the originator. The result of the half-hour he spent in Mr. Elton's parlour was generally more satisfactory, if more delusive.

END OF VOL. II.

GILBERT AND RIVINGTON, PRINTERS, ST. JOHN'S SQUARE, LONDON.